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MY LADY COQUETTE.

A NOVEL.

BY

"RITA,"

AUTHOR OF "VIVIENNE," "LIKE DIAN'S KISS,"
"COUNTESS DAPHNE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MY LADY COQUETTE.

CHAPTER I.

IT is all very desolate and quiet now at Mervyn Court. The shadows of sorrow and suffering have fallen heavily around. The girls go about with soft footfalls and tearful eyes; all sounds of merriment and laughter are hushed. The old man sits in his lonely room, and babbles cheerfully of by-gone days and long-past events, knowing nothing of the cloud that has settled on his household, nothing of the fate that has banished his best-loved child from her home.

Even Arthur has lost all his gay spirits, and is ceaselessly perplexed as to what is to be done with regard to Yolande. Lance comes over on the morning after the funeral, and together the young people discuss plans of future action—but all without any tangible result. No one has the slightest clue to the girl's present abode or her means of support, and all attempts to trace or follow her are rendered unsafe by the knowledge of Budd's intentions and the dread that, were she found, his malice might be once again put in force.

"For a time at least we can make no movement to follow her," says Lance, drearily; "she has fled to evade the horrors of further publicity in this sad matter. It would be cruel and unwise to prevent her finding the safety and peace she needs."

"But the look of it all!" urges Arthur. "Most persons will say she has run away because she's afraid to face the consequences of her own actions. It would have been far better to brave it out, I think."

"For you, yes," says Lance, quietly. "But, remember, Yolande is only a girl, and nervous and timid and unstrung. She cannot endure again what she went through so bravely at the inquest. We could hardly expect it."

"I shall wring that Budd's neck if he comes in my way!" exclaims Arthur, furiously. "The wretched, muddling spy, to bring down all this shame and suffering on us for the sake of some crack-brained notion of his own! Pshaw, it sickens me to think of it!"

"As soon as ever it is safe," continues Lance, gravely, "I shall try to find out where Yolande is. But at present we must trust to herself, as she says in her letter. There is no use in helping to put Budd on the scent of her hiding-place; it would be folly. When he has grown tired of his preposterous notion and allowed matters to drop, then we may take further steps in the matter. Till then—"

"Yes, that's all very fine," interposes Arthur, indignantly. "But she's my own sister, and in my father's present state I look

upon myself as the head of the family, and don't like to think of her as friendless or in trouble, doing goodness only knows what. With no money, and no one to advise her—why, it's—"

His words are cut short by the opening of the door and the voice of the old butler announcing soberly,—

"Mr Budd."

For a moment dead silence reigns among the little party. Then they all rise, as if by one common impulse, and face the enemy of their peaceful home, the smiling spy, who has been the cause of all the suffering and misery they have lately endured. None of them address him, and, as his eyes turn from one to another of the pale indignant young faces, even his calm serene visage looks slightly discomposed.

"Sorry to disturb you, I'm sure, young ladies," he says, with a grave bow; "but business must be attended to, you know."

"I'm at a loss to imagine what business

you can have in this house, Mr Budd!' exclaims Arthur, indignantly.

An almost seraphic smile breaks over the fat face of the police inspector.

"It can be soon explained," he says, softly. "I am here to arrest your sister, Miss Yolande Mervyn, on a charge of murder!"

The silence that follows those horrible words is not long; but it is Lance Stapleton who breaks it with his scornful laugh, Lance Stapleton whose steady hand arrests Arthur Mervyn's impetuous arm, which in another moment would have levelled the insulter of his sister's honour to the ground.

"Are you still blindly following up that absurd idea?" he asks, ironically. "Pray do your duty, Mr Policeman. Search the house and grounds as you please. I wish you all success in your search; only—pray relieve us of your presence!"

So fierce and threatening is his aspect as he stands towering over the white-faced spy, that the man hastily retreats into the passage

and summons two satellites to his assistance, none of the wondering household offering let or hindrance to their actions.

Naturally, in answer to their inquiries for Miss Mervyn, the servants tell them that the young lady has left home suddenly and unexpectedly; and the unlooked-for information sends Budd, irate and furious, back to the room where the young Mervyns are quietly awaiting his reception of the news.

"Come, come, Mr Mervyn," he says, blusteringly, confident now in the protection of his two men, "this trifling won't do with the law, you know! I want your sister; and it's your duty to tell me where she is, and give me the clue to her movements. Beware how you break the Queen's peace!"

"I have no intention of breaking the Queen's peace, or anything else," returns Arthur, scornfully. "If you want my sister, find her; that's your business. I know no more where she is than you do."

"Oh, ah! A good joke! You expect me

to believe that? Come now, Mr Mervyn, if you don't happen to know where she is hiding, at least your friend there does, I'll be bound! And I give you all warning that in aiding the escape of a criminal you are guilty of felony, and liable to be prosecuted. I require instant and correct information as to the whereabouts of Miss Mervyn!"

"For what purpose?" asks a gruff, quiet voice at this juncture—a voice that makes Mr Budd jump as though he had suddenly stepped on a red-hot coal—a voice that calls up astonishment and relief into the pale indignant faces of the little group. "I ask for what purpose Inspector Budd requires information respecting Miss Mervyn?" persists the interrogator, who is no other than Lance Stapleton's friend, Mr Herrick.

"For the purpose of arresting her," stammers the man, his white fat face turning ghastly now in the effort to appear perfectly at ease before the mocking glance and unwelcome presence of this new intruder and ancient foe.

"Indeed! That is a strange proceeding!' replies Mr Herrick, cynically. "You are quite sure you have justifiable grounds for it this time, Budd?"

"I have no time to waste on idle words," retorts the inspector, furiously. "I am here in the exercise of duty; and I call upon the members of this family once more to give me the information I have asked for."

"What is your charge against Miss Mervyn?" persists Mr Herrick, coolly, while the twin sisters exchange frightened glances, and Lance Stapleton still holds with detaining pressure the arm of his indignant and furious friend.

"Wilful murder!" says Budd, shortly, taking malicious pleasure in emphasising the horrible words.

"And the person murdered?" continues the old lawyer, with perfect *sang-froid.*

"I should hardly think you needed to be told that," answers the man, with a brutal laugh. "Haven't you heard of Mr Denzil Charteris, and his strange death?"

"Assuredly! And so you conclude that Miss Mervyn has—murdered—him? And you have actually gone so far as to take out a warrant! Oh, Budd, Budd, what a long way off you are still from the requirements of a proper detective! Alas for Scotland Yard —what it has lost, and what we as a county have gained! Once more, Budd, you are on the wrong scent. Take my advice, and be warned off in time. Don't expose yourself to further ridicule, even in the cause of that 'justice' you so laudably serve."

"Mr Herrick, sir," exclaims Budd, turning ghastlier than ever in his fury, "you are pleased to joke at my expense; but let me assure you this is no joking matter!"

"I refrain from making the pun to which you tempt me," returns the lawyer, grimly, with grave enjoyment of his opponent's discomfiture; "and I'll give you a valuable and unexpected piece of information, Mr Budd, which I know you are far enough from expecting. Your warrant is utterly useless. Put it

in the fire, and go quietly home; and the next time you go blood-hunting, be sure there's something to hunt."

"I—I am not jesting, Mr Herrick," retorts Budd, indignantly; "and I'm not here to bandy words with you. Once more, Mr Mervyn, will you give me the information I require, or not?"

"Certainly not!" answers Arthur.

"Certainly not," echoes Mr Herrick,—"because you have no right to ask for it, and no cause to justify its receipt. There, Mr Budd!"

"I shall lay your refusal before the proper authorities," continues the inspector, disregarding Mr Herrick's remarks; "and I shall redouble my exertions to find the guilty—"

"Stop!" thunders the lawyer, in a voice that arrests the words on the spy's lips and leaves him open-mouthed and mute in astonishment. "Stop, you blundering fool, and hear me out before you dare asperse an innocent and honoured name by your foul-mouthed malice! Miss Mervyn is as innocent

as I am of this crime with which you would charge her. Do you want proof? Well, go straight off from here to Beechhampton Priory, and learn there that there is no crime, and no criminal for you to hound on to destruction. Denzil Charteris has returned alive and well as any of us here!"

Amazement, relief, and incredulity are produced in the minds of each recipient of this astounding news. In a moment Budd is forgotten. The listeners crowd around Mr Herrick, imploring, questioning, exclaiming, all in one. But it is only when the door has closed on his baffled and humiliated foe that the old lawyer's lips are unsealed, and he gives them the scant information it is in his power to supply.

"I have heard no particulars," he says. "I learnt the news only an hour ago. Mr Charteris went off on one of his curious and unexplained journeys, and of course never looked at papers or anything else; met with some accident in a railway train, so they say; was laid up ill for weeks, and only a day or

two ago heard all that has happened here, and came rushing back to contradict the news as fast as rails and engines could bring him. It will be all over the place in a short time. There, there, my dears, don't cry! You ought to be wild with joy at hearing it! Your sister is safe enough now. Find her, and bring her back, and she'll be the heroine of the hour, I'll be bound, just as Charteris is the hero!"

"It's positively astounding!" exclaims Arthur, breathless and pale with agitation.

"But now we must at once seek for Yolande," adds Lance, his honest face brimming over with joy and relief at the wonderful news.

"There spoke the practical man," laughs Mr Herrick. "Find her by all means. I've got my hands full of some other business at present, or I'd offer to help; but there can be no difficulty in tracing her, I should think; and, besides, she's sure to hear that Charteris has come back—she'll see it in the newspapers."

"Hurrah!" cries Arthur, joyfully and ex-

citedly. "This is luck and no mistake! But, oh, what a fool Charteris was to sneak off in that mysterious way and give us such a fright!"

"Yes; and there's still one thing unexplained," continues Lance, thoughtfully. "If this body found in Dead Man's Pool was not that of Charteris, whose was it?"

"That no one knows yet," returns the old lawyer, with his dry chuckle. "Perhaps Budd can tell us!"

. . . . . .

The news is indeed true; and all the village is ringing with it. Denzil Charteris has returned, ill, worn, haggard-looking, but safe and sound in body, and proving as plainly as flesh and blood can prove that it certainly was not himself who was found in Dead Man's Pool—certainly not himself who was mourned for and buried in the Charteris vaults but two days since.

The eager gossipers and scandal-mongers receive but scant information as to his strange

absence. He merely states that sudden and important business called him away to Wales, that an accident to the train in which he travelled delayed his return journey, as he was injured so severely that for weeks he was unable to leave his bed, and during all that time he remained in total ignorance of the events happening at Beechhampton and Ashbourne. While travelling homewards, he read in a newspaper the disastrous consequences of his abrupt and unexplained absence, and he hurried with all possible speed to the Priory, in order to give the best possible refutation to the reports by his own immediate presence.

This statement, repeated, enlarged, and exaggerated, is the talk of the day now, flying from tongue to tongue, from ear to ear, in every possible variation. But the main point remains the same. Denzil Charteris is alive, and Yolande Mervyn has been too hastily misjudged. Popular favour now turns in her direction; and great are the

wonder and amazement when the news comes that she is no longer at home to receive its flattering sympathy.

The real facts of her sudden departure are carefully concealed by the Mervyns; and it is generally supposed that she has been sent away to escape the unpleasant notoriety brought upon her by the rapid course of events.

In the evening Denzil Charteris rides over to the Court, and has an interview with Arthur and his sisters. Indignant as they are at his conduct and all it has brought upon their elder sister, it is impossible not to be touched by the changed, haggard face, the utter desolation in look, voice, and aspect of the once proud *debonnaire* Denzil Charteris. He is suffering as they suffer, and they are touched; and insensibly their coldness and stiffness give way, and the whole sad, pitiful tale of Yolande's misery is told.

He sits with his head bowed on his hands, its deadly whiteness and suppressed passion

hidden from their gaze, while anguish intolerable seems gnawing at his heart-strings with every fresh word he has to hear.

At last he springs to his feet, and the long pent-up agony of his heart finds vent in bitter self-reproach.

"I will find her, though I search the world through!" he cries aloud. "I have given her this to bear—to me belongs the task of restitution." Then he calms himself by a strong effort, and turns imploringly to Arthur. "I have loved your sister more dearly than any one knows," he says, earnestly, "and all unwittingly I have brought this suffering on her head. Can you give me no help, no clue to follow now? Surely some of you must have an idea as to where she was going—what plan she had formed?"

"We have none," answers Arthur, moodily. "I don't know a single friend to whom she could have gone; and all our inquiries at the railway station and in the village have failed to gain any information as to how or when she

left Ashbourne. No one bearing the slightest resemblance to Yolande has been seen to leave the place. It is all a mystery."

"Could she have gone disguised?" asks Denzil, anxiously.

Arthur shakes his head in moody doubt; but Enid starts up hastily at the words, and clasps her eager hands in joyful relief.

"Of course! Now I see it all!" she exclaims. "Arthur, don't you remember the station-master at Colston told us no lady went by the early train that day except a sister of mercy? When we were making dresses for our private theatricals last Christmas, Yolande made one for herself—just such a dress as the sisters of mercy wear. In looking over her boxes and wardrobe to find out what she had taken, I did not see that dress anywhere. I noticed its absence, because Yolande always had it hanging on a peg among her other dresses, and was always saying she must put it away. Suppose—"

"There is no need to suppose anything

further, I'm sure," interrupts Denzil Charteris, in a voice of intense relief. "You have given me the clue I need, Miss Enid. It won't be my fault if I don't follow it up to the end."

And he leaves them with lighter hearts and surer hopes than any they have known since Yolande left.

At the Priory his aunt and cousin are awaiting his return with feverish suspense. But, even as he enters the room, Pauline Ray reads a new history in his face, a new determination in his eyes. Her heart sinks, her pulses throb with fiery pain.

"Am I to lose the game after all?" she says to herself.

"Aunt," exclaims Denzil, with sudden resolution, "I am going away at once to London! I may be detained for a long or short time; I cannot tell. Stay on here as long as you please, and manage just as you always manage."

"Going away again? Oh, Denzil," cries Mrs Ray, fretfully, "can you never remain

quietly at home? What takes you off so suddenly now?"

"I am going to seek Yolande Mervyn," he answers, gravely. "It is only fair, after all she has suffered and endured, that I should take some trouble in restoring her to her home and friends again."

"But, my dear boy," exclaims Mrs Ray, in undisguised amazement, "I thought Miss Mervyn's friends were perfectly well acquainted with the place of her refuge and the reasons for her sudden departure? Why need you go and interfere in the matter?"

"No one knows where she is or whither she has fled," returns Denzil, in tones that are strangely hoarse and unsteady. "All this shame and scandal, brought in blind ignorance and brutal obstinacy on her innocent head, has made her desperate in her fear and terror. It was my folly that originated the error in the first place; it is my duty to make what reparation I can now."

"Since when have you constituted yourself

a champion of woman's wrongs, Denzil?" asks Pauline, sarcastically.

"Since I found a woman worthy of the championship," is the hasty retort.

"And that flighty little coquette is your idea of a woman worthy of such an inestimable honour! Really, Denzil, I gave you credit for better taste!"—and the beautiful Pauline rises languidly from her seat and leaves the room.

"It is all over now," she cries to herself, as she wrings her hands in bitterness and anguish—"all over! He will find her, and she will not scorn his wooing a second time—and then it will all come out. Budd is not to be trusted. The discovery of the ring may be questioned at any moment. Oh, Heaven, what a network of destruction I have coiled around my own feet!"

At night, in the solitude of her own room, Pauline Ray sits writing till long after midnight has struck. It is a letter, the composition of which seems difficult—one that is

written and altered many times ere it seems to satisfy her. In the morning that letter is delivered by a trusty messenger to Inspector Budd at Colston.

Two hours after its receipt that worthy individual has packed up his few possessions and is speeding as fast as the express train can take him to London.

It is long ere the light of his seraphic countenance beams on the good folk of Ashbourne again, and then it is under very different auspices.

CHAPTER II.

IN a sombre old-fashioned room of a sombre old-fashioned house in a remote part of North Wales a group of girls are congregated one autumn evening.

A fire burns in the large roomy grate, making a welcome glow of light in the great dusky schoolroom, where forms and tables abound, and the bare floor is warmed by no pretence at carpeting. Yet it is a pleasant room despite its bareness. The long windows are hidden now by crimson curtains, and the weird sighs of the wind as it rattles the outside frames and dashes the pelting, pouring rain against the glass make the contrast of the interior warmth doubly cheery.

The girls all crowd round the fire, laughing

and chatting in gay school-girl fashion—a fashion doubly precious because indulged only in just some rare half-hour of leisure like this, when the day's work is over and they are at liberty to make the most of their time "between lights" ere the advent of tea and governesses.

"Ugh, but it's cold enough for winter!" cries one tall, large-limbed girl, with a shudder, as she crouches nearer the blaze and holds out two white well-shaped hands in order to warm them.

"Winter will soon be here, thank goodness!" answers another. "At Christmas I leave."

"Lucky you! How I wish I was seventeen! Rose and I have two more terms to go through, I suppose."

"If I grow any more, papa will have to let me leave for decency's sake," says Rose Bertram, the tall girl who spoke first. "I look older than any one of you now."

"And know less!" says a thin-faced super-

cilious girl in the corner, Jane Croft by name.

"That's a matter of opinion, my dear," rejoins Rose Bertram, calmly. "I know quite enough. I don't mean to set up for a blue-stocking."

"I wonder where Miss Merton is this afternoon?" says a dark-faced, gentle-looking girl in the pause that follows this last speech.

"Out, I believe," answers Rose Bertram—"at least she said she was going."

"Fancy going out in such weather!" puts in Jane Croft. "But then Miss Merton is always doing odd things."

"She's awfully nice for all that," declares Rose heartily. "It seems a shame she should be a governess. I never saw any one so thoroughly unlike my ideas of a teacher."

"She plays and sings so well, and then she is so sweet, and has such merry ways at times. I like her even better than Mrs Davies."

"Mrs Davies is very fond of her, isn't

she?" inquires Josephine Herron, the dark girl who has before spoken.

"Very!" chorus several voices. "Don't you know she was a pupil of hers long ago, before she opened this school?"

"I heard her call her by her Christian name once," says Rose Bertram. "What do you think it was?"

"The subject is not sufficiently interesting to trouble about guessing," answers sarcastic Jane Croft. "To hear you all go on about Miss Merton, one would imagine no such paragon had ever existed before!"

"In point of governesses I think there never has," avers Rose. "My only wonder is what could have induced her to bury herself here —a girl so young and beautiful, so different in every way from the girls one usually meets."

"Yes; is she not?" exclaims Josephine Herron, enthusiastically. "I daresay it is some trouble that has forced her into such a position. She looks at times so sad. I never

saw a face so soon light up and so soon shadow over as hers."

"What a romance you are building up around your pattern governess!" exclaims Jane Croft, impatiently. "Because she happens to have a pretty face, straightway you magnify her into a heroine, with a history in the background. If she had happened to be plain, you would never have wasted a second thought on her. Yet I think it is George Eliot who remarks wisely that people are no better because they have long eyelashes."

"How bitter you are on feminine beauty as a rule!" laughs Amy Roberts, the eldest and head girl of the school, who has been listening in quiet amusement to the discussion. "Of course we all know it's 'a snare,' and 'only skin-deep,' and all the rest of it; but still I doubt much if any one of us would object to be dowered with it at this present moment in preference to those other attributes of learning, sense, and amiability which Jane so loudly extols."

"Jane is quite right though!" says a sweet voice behind the last speaker, a voice which makes all turn, and lights every face but one with gladness and welcome. "Don't disturb yourselves, pray! I can find a corner here. Now, who is it among you that is foolish enough to prefer beauty to learning, sense, and amiability?"

"All of us, I am afraid," laughs Rose, making room beside herself for the beautiful dark-robed figure. "Not that it's of much use though, Miss Merton! The mantle of Aphrodite has not fallen on any of our shoulders."

"I never heard that Aphrodite had a mantle," laughs the new comer, "except foam, or something equally untrustworthy and transparent. My dear girls, be content with yourselves as you are! There never was a beautiful woman yet who did not cause far more unhappiness than she gave joy or peace or gladness."

"Have you ever caused anything of the sort?" asks Rose, stroking with sisterly

affection the lovely bright hair of this girl-governess.

"I?"—and the beautiful face paled and the fringed lids drooped suddenly. "What an absurd question, Rose! I am not Aphrodite."

"A very good imitation then!" laughs the other, heedless of the scorn on Jane Croft's pale lips and watchful eyes.

"You are a sad flatterer, Rose," answers the kneeling girl, with a strange weariness in her voice now. "There is one thing I have failed lamentably in during my career as a governess, and that is the inspiring of due awe and respect in your youthful minds."

"That's quite true!" laughs Rose, merrily. "Isn't it girls?"

"There is a saying that 'perfect love casteth out fear,' is there not?" asks gentle Josephine, as she glances from one bright face to another of the listening group.

"Well, I would rather have the love, I must say," observes the lovely little gover-

ness, thoughtfully. "It has been a great comfort to me often and often to know that you all care for me a little, that you would miss me if I went, and—"

"If you went?" interposes Josephine, hastily. "You must never go while I am at school, Miss Merton!"

The young teacher raises her head, and looks lovingly at the tender, eager face above her.

"I should not wish to do so," she says; "but no one can tell what may happen."

"Most people can regulate their lives according to their wishes," chimes in the clear, modulated voice of Jane Croft—"people, that is to say, who have no sins and shadows lurking in the background, whose history is a fair and open page for all the world to read."

"I differ from you in that respect," answers Miss Merton, coldly. "Our lives are shaped and directed for us by a far higher and more powerful agent than our own wills, though the sins and shadows of which you speak are

often the results of by-gone follies and errors."

"There is a Minerva-like speech!" laughs Rose Bertram, merrily. "My dear little governess, don't go in for lectures and learning out of school-hours! It is quite bad enough to see you at the uncongenial task then!"

"Why do you imagine it uncongenial?" asks Miss Merton, somewhat sternly.

"Why? Oh, because you look like a princess in disguise, of course!" answers Rose, who alone of all the girls who love this strange young teacher ever dares to interrogate her fearlessly, and yet not too curiously.

Miss Merton rises from her work by the bright flames, and stands pale and grave and anxious before them all.

"Pray don't say such things!" she entreats, while the cold watchful eyes of Jane Croft take in every shade on the bright fair face, every anxious glance of the violet-hued eyes. "They are quite wrong—quite! I am a governess, just as hundreds of others of my sex, as young

as I am, are governesses—from necessity. I have more to be thankful for than many of them, because the lines have fallen to me in pleasanter places than they have found. As to my being unsuited to my position, or my position to me, please don't pay me the bad compliment of saying that again. I try to do my best, you know."

"You are a darling; you are far too good to be wearied and bothered by a pack of girls like us!" exclaims Rose, enthusiastically. "And really— But you are not going?"

"I am—I must," laughs the young governess, merrily. "I promised Mrs Davies to get out the preserves for tea. Think of that!"

"And, of course, I can't come and help you," says Rose, lugubriously, "as we're not allowed in the store-room."

"Lucky for the store-room!" laughs the gay young voice as the door opens and closes; while the advent of lights and servants disperses the group by the fire and checks further confidences.

"Ah, me! And once I could not even order a dinner or tell one preserve from another!" says the girl, who, with keys in hand, treads the gloomy cold stone passage to the store-room. "I wonder what dear old Skippy would say if she saw me now?"

But when she reaches the room she seems to forget all about the errand that brought her there. She puts down the light, and leans her arms on the low broad shelf, where row upon row of carefully-labelled jars are quietly awaiting their turn for consumption.

The listless attitude, the very grace of the slender figure, the bowed head hidden from sight in both the tiny white hands, all bespeak some trouble bravely hidden beneath the usually bright face and active energies of this girl who has done her work bravely and steadily for many a weary month—done it too so well that few if any of those among whom she has lived and with whom she has mingled have any suspicion of the weight on mind and heart.

But now, when there are no eyes to see, no ears to hear her, she leans against the cold hard shelves and cries as if her tiree little heart were breaking.

"I wonder how long I must bear it?" she asks herself, desolately. "It is all so hard, so different! And yet, if it had not been for work and duties, if I had only had to sit idle and mourn and weep over my sorrow, I should have died, I think."

Then with sudden effort she dries her eyes and smoothes back the wavy flossy curls that ripple over her white forehead.

"Let me see—it was strawberry jam to-night," she says, dubiously, and then laughs a faint little laugh, even amidst her scarce-dried tears. "An odd cure for the heartache, but by no means a bad one," she says, carefully lifting down the required jar—"the care and administration of—preserves!"

CHAPTER III.

THE long schoolroom at Llewellyn House is filled by a crowd of hungry merry girls, as Miss Merton takes her place at the end of the well-spread board.

A pleasant-faced white-haired old lady presides at the head of the table; the English and French governesses sit one on each side of her; the junior governess is at the bottom, facing Mrs Davies. It is by no means an unattractive sight, this bevy of damsels of all ages and sizes. There are about thirty boarders in the school. There is an abundance of comely, healthy good looks, fair skins, rosy cheeks, fine eyes, luxuriant hair. Conversation is not forbidden, though kept within

due limits; and Mrs Davies is apt to look complacently on the many happy faces around that long table, and take credit to her kind womanly heart for the content and unrestraint which make their school-life so pleasant.

At Miss Merton's end gaiety and goodwill seem the order of the night. Never was teacher so adored by pupils as this lovely sweet-faced girl is. Never had instructress so light and easy a time of it as this favoured junior; for Mrs Davies pets and makes much of her, and gives her only the pleasantest duties to perform—duties which, while affording welcome occupation to her mind, and preventing a too-constant brooding over troubles long since confessed to the kind schoolmistress, yet never busy her more than she can bear, never diverge into the monotonous drudgery which makes many a governess's life so irksome.

"No lessons to-night, thank goodness!" ejaculates Rose Bertram, who, though the biggest, is by far the idlest girl in the

school. "Miss Merton, you'll stop in the schoolroom and tell us a story, won't you?"

"Sorry to refuse such an inviting prospect, Rose," laughs the pretty governess; "but I am going out this evening to the rectory; so I can't accept it."

"Bother the rectory!" exclaims Rose, impatiently. "You are always going there now! I am sure I can't imagine what you can see in that quiet old-fashioned Mr Eward. I wouldn't spend an evening with him for something!"

"There is to be a small party there to-night," says Miss Merton. "I am going to sing."

"I wish I could go with you," utters Rose in an intense whisper. "Mr Eward might have asked me."

"Suppose he has?" answers Miss Merton, with a merry glance.

"Oh," exclaims Rose, "you cruel little thing! And you've kept it a secret all this time! Now are you joking, or is it really true?"

"Really true. Ask Mrs Davies," returns the governess.

Rose claps her hands with delight. The bare notion of going out to ever such a small festivity in the company of her adored friend —for so she considers the young teacher—is too ecstatic for calm consideration.

"What shall I wear?" she asks next, but at this Miss Merton only laughs and says she is the best judge of that.

"My dear Miss Merton," interrupts the voice of the principal at this juncture, "and you, my dear Rose, as you are both to go to the rectory at eight o'clock, I think you may as well retire. I daresay you will require a little time for your toilettes."

The girls all look up in wonder, awe, or envy at this unexpected announcement. It is not often that any of the girls are favoured with invitations, even of the mildest and dullest description; and anything is an excitement that relieves the unvarying routine of school discipline.

Propriety and respect prevent any outward display of Rose's inward delight. She merely says, "Thank you, Mrs Davies," and retires demurely from the room. Once upstairs, however, and in her own private domain, represented by the large bedroom shared with some half-dozen schoolmates, she gives free vent to her excited feelings. She hugs her little governess till she is almost breathless—not that Miss Merton is really little, but she is of such slender and exquisite proportions that somehow one can never realise her being tall, though her height is the full average height of women.

"You darling! It is too delicious to think of, our going out to a party together!" exclaims Rose, whirling the breathless form of her companion round and round as she speaks in a species of dancing quite unknown as yet to the participator in her gyrations.

"Do let me go, my dear!" cries Miss Merton, imploringly, as she vainly tries to stay Rose's violent whirls.

"There! Oh, I beg your pardon! I didn't mean to do that!" exclaims the excited girl, apologetically. "My stars! What magnificent hair!" she continues, gazing in open-eyed admiration at the gleaming shower loosed from its fastenings by her frantic movements.

"You wild girl!" cries her friend, laughing and panting as she tosses back the fallen masses. "One would think you had never been to a party in your life!"

"No more I have," says Rose, briskly—"except children's parties. They don't count. Oh, but please tell me what I ought to wear!" she adds, entreatingly.

"What have you?" asks Miss Merton.

"Lots of dresses; but I'm afraid I've got so fat none of them will fit," says Rose, lugubriously.

"Your black velveteen would do nicely," suggests her companion. "You only want some white frilling about the neck and sleeves. Have you any?"

"Not a scrap," returns Rose, dismally.

"And isn't black rather old, Miss Merton? My white muslin now?"

"My dear girl," laughs Miss Merton, "your white muslin would about reach your ankles; and, as for the body, no persuasion on earth would induce it to meet."

"I daresay you're right," sighs Rose. "Well, I must make the best of it!"

"Come into my room after your hair is done," says her companion, "and bring your dress. I will soon make it look festive. The body can be folded back into a square, and I can give you some white lace to fill it in. You'll look very well then;" and cutting short Rose's enthusiastic thanks, she hurriedly leaves the room.

Twenty minutes later, when Rose Bertram, mindful of the invitation she has received, enters the tiny bedroom which belongs to Miss Merton, she starts with surprise at seeing her friend kneeling by the window, her hair still loose and hanging to her waist, and no preparation yet made for her toilette.

The blind is drawn up, and the storm seems to have passed away, leaving the full beauty of the autumn night to the gaze of the lovely, sorrowful eyes that watch it so intently.

"My dear Miss Merton," exclaims Rose, mournfully, "you have not even begun to dress—and it's so late!"

She stands beside the girl as she speaks, and follows the strained intent gaze into the dim blue of the sky and the dazzling glory of the starshine.

Miss Merton turns with a sudden start and a heavy sigh.

"You here? Are you ready, Rose?" she cries, wonderingly. "I—I had forgotten."

"What is there in the stars which always makes you forget, dear?" asks Rose, gently. "I have never seen you gaze at them in any night that is fair and peaceful like this without that sad strange look coming over your face, without your seeming to forget everything and every one around you for some memory that they bring."

"I pray that you may never know such memories, Rose," half sobs the kneeling girl as she lifts her face up in the pale radiance of the outer light.

"I will not ask you what they are," murmurs Rose, suddenly, as she drops upon her knees beside her friend and looks with softened eyes at her face, so pale in its passionate sadness, so touching in its shadowed grief. "I have known and thought often that you had some memories that could pain you even when you seemed glad and merry for our sakes. But, oh! do let me say now how I hope you will not be always unhappy! Brightness and love seem so entirely meant for you."

The girl sighs and leans her weary little head against the shoulder of her friend.

"You are very kind," she says. "I should like to tell you now, Rose, what I have often meant to tell you before, but always failed. It is that all the love and sympathy I have met here have done much to lighten the

sorrow that will always be my portion—how much you can never know, for I can never tell."

Rose is silent. Wild and wayward and idle as she is, there still lies at the bottom of her brave honest heart an instinctive sympathy that shows her plainly enough when it is best to speak and best to refrain, and the girl leaning in silent gratitude against that friendly faithful breast is thankful for the quiet and the peace that enable her to regain her self-command.

At the expiration of five minutes she rises, and, with a tender clinging kiss to Rose, puts her aside and steps up to the toilette-table.

"We shall have an illumination," she says, gaily, as she lights her own candle from that of Rose and places one on each side of the glass. "Now, my dear, bring me your dress."

Rose obeys with alacrity, watching with wondering admiration how the deft fingers open and fold back the cut-away front of the body of her dress and fasten the sleeves to

elbow-length, tacking in pretty soft frills of *lisse* in both.

"There!" she says, triumphantly. "Now put that on while I do my hair."

But Rose, even amidst her gratitude, forgets all about dress and everything else as she looks at the lovely figure before her; for Miss Merton slips off her dark serge dress and stands in the most charming of *négligé*. The dainty low bodice of her white petticoat framing in her ivory arms and shoulders and exquisite bust, half her golden tresses waving down to her knees, the other half held in her upraised hand.

"My stars!" ejaculates Rose, using her favourite and most forcible expression, "won't some man go mad about you some day, Yolande!"

As the last word leaves her lips the girl flashes round upon her with the suddenness of lightning. Her face is white, her hand trembles, so that all the wavy mass of hair falls down heavily.

"How did you know my name?" she asks, fiercely.

Rose shrinks back a pace in the amazement that she feels at sight of the wrathful face, the flashing eyes.

"I—I beg your pardon," she says, humbly. "I heard Mrs Davies call you that; and ever since it has haunted me. It is so pretty and quaint, and just now I forgot."

"Then have the goodness to forget it always," requests Yolande, haughtily. "I allow no one here to use my Christian name or—mention it."

"Don't be angry with me, please!" entreats poor Rose, piteously. "I did not mean to offend you; it slipped out accidentally."

Despite her anger, the girl can hardly repress a smile at the frightened, beseeching gaze of her penitent friend. She steps forward hastily and kisses the quivering lips.

"There, never mind, dear," she says, hurriedly, "You did not know, of course. Have you told any one else?"

"No," answers Rose, remembering thankfully how near an escape she has had of telling it to the whole school, and, inwardly thankful, to Jane Croft for preventing it at the time.

"That is right; then please don't. I—I have reasons which make me averse to having it known to any one here," explains Yolande. And then she turns away and proceeds once more with the business of her toilette.

But a shadow has fallen over Rose's prospects of enjoyment. She cannot forget the startled face, the frightened, angry eyes, that flashed upon her after that unfortunate avowal, and her heart is heavy within her, remembering that something more than mere annoyance lurked behind her governess's dismay that her name was known.

"She has a secret of some sort," thinks Rose, as she fastens the body of her velvet dress, too troubled and perplexed to glance even at the charming effect of the black and white against her fine clear skin. "Well, it is no business of mine. I could not love her

less even if she was a murderess or—anything equally horrible."

"Are you going in black too?" she asks suddenly, as she sees Yolande take out a plain black cashmere and begin to put it on.

"Yes," answers Yolande. "I remember my position, you see, dear, even if all the others here are good enough to tempt me to forget it."

"It doesn't signify what you wear," continues Rose, admiringly; "you always look beautiful."

"Please don't," says the girl, suddenly, a pained entreaty breaking out in her pleading voice. "I never want to be told that. I hate the very word."

"But no one could help telling you, because it is so plain and true," answers Rose, forgetting all about their little scene now in the passionate enthusiasm which this friend of hers always evokes. "How well those white chrysanthemums look in your hair and dress! But why wouldn't you have it open like mine?

It's a perfect shame to hide so lovely a neck and throat as yours!"

"What a pity we don't live in the good old times when open bodies were *de rigueur!*" laughs Yolande, lightly. "However all those women escaped bronchitis and consumption is a marvel to me. Now I'm ready. Are you?"

"Yes," answers Rose, approaching the glass and giving a first and last glance at the frank open face and full Juno-like figure which represent her own pretensions to feminine beauty. "How nice you have made my dress look! I should hardly know it."

"And, since you have taken my advice and learnt that velvet and crinolines never will harmonise, your figure looks charming," says Yolande, approvingly. "How glad I shall be when the hateful things are really out of fashion!"

Then she presses another kiss on her friend's firm glowing cheek, and, taking the candle to light them down, leads the way out of the room.

The rectory is not far off; and the two girls, wrapped in their waterproofs, and with a scarf thrown over each of their heads, soon reach the gate and go through the old-fashioned sweet-smelling garden where the rain has made all moist and fresh and green for the short remaining time that flowers will have their place in the fast-waning autumn.

"It is chilly," says Yolande, giving a faint shiver as they go up the broad gravelled path together.

"Chilly!" echoes Rose, in surprise. "I was just thinking how warm it is for October. And yet— But how pale you look!" she adds, suddenly.

"You never had a presentiment, I suppose?" rejoins her companion, with a mirthless little laugh that somehow jars strangely on her friend's ear.

"No, I can't say I ever had," she answers, wonderingly.

"Well," says Yolande—and another shiver runs through the slight girlish form as she

speaks—"if I believed in such things, Rose, I should go right straight away from this house to-night, instead of entering it as we are about to do. There, don't look so startled, dear. I am not going to do it. Let us see what presentiments are worth."

CHAPTER IV.

IT is a very pleasant room into which both the girls are ushered, a room where the white-haired clergyman's face beams kindly welcome, and his sister's cheery voice and cordial manners would have set even the shyest guests at their ease.

"All the *élite* of the place seem to be here," whispers Rose Bertram to her companion as they seat themselves in a nook of the curtained windows and look out from there at the well-filled room. "Do they generally have parties like this when you come?"

"No; I have never seen so many people here before," answers Yolande, as she takes the proffered cup of tea now brought round.

"I wish there were more men—young men

I mean," continues Rose, cautiously balancing a tea-cake on the edge of her saucer. "Whenever I go anywhere, Miss Merton, I always come back with a vivid sense of the preponderance of our sex over the other."

"Do you?" says Yolande, trying to smile, though she feels it is a very mirthless attempt.

"Yes; even here there is the same want. We have the doctor and the clergyman, and the doctor's assistant, and the two rival lawyers, who live goodness knows how—for people in Ystradffelter are far too sleepy to quarrel or litigate about anything—and that's about all the male element of society we can boast of. There are plenty of widows and old maids; but the widows have no sons and the old maids no brothers, and altogether life is very drowsy and unsensational. Even when I leave school I sha'n't be much better off, for papa lives about two miles from here, and is so devoted to his sheep and his stables that it never occurs to him I am stagnating in the dull monotony of such a dreary life."

"And you have no mother or sister?" questions her companion, gently.

"No. I have two brothers; but they are never at home. I really don't know whether I shall be most glad or sorry to leave school—at least there are the girls and—you."

"I come last then?" smiles Yolande.

The expressive glance of Rose Bertram's blue eyes contradicts the assertion almost more emphatically than her words, and at the same moment their hostess glides up, bringing a suitable young man in tow, whom she introduces to the girls as Sir Edward Llewellyn, a near neighbour of theirs, who owns Llewellyn Park, the next estate to Pwyn Dyas, Rose Bertram's place of abode.

The young man—he is five-and-thirty at least—has but little to say for himself. He is too occupied in staring at Yolande, whom he thinks the loveliest being ever robed in feminine garb and sent among men as their destroyer. For she utterly destroys him; sense, comfort, peace, all go down like a

pack of cards before one careless, lazy glance of the exquisite eyes, one faint quivering smile of the perfect lips.

Alas! for poor Rose and her well-meant endeavours to entertain her stalwart companion. They are quite thrown away; he has eyes and ears for no one but Yolande—Yolande, whose calm indifference seems more utterly bewitching in his eyes than all the assiduous efforts of the muslin-clad damsels whose glances rest beseechingly on his averted face—Yolande, who does not even remember his name, who takes his arm and suffers him to lead her to the piano, unknowing that even the light touch of her little hand sends thrills of curious pain and perplexity to this foolish fellow's heart.

She sings that loveliest of Gounod's songs,—"Oh that we two were maying!"—sings, just as she does most things, with no apparent effort, with no music set before her, with her pretty fingers bringing out the beautiful chords in exactly suitable shades to her sweet pathetic

voice. But the pathos deepens, the pleading, passionate music thrills out with weird, strange pain as she comes to the last verse, and, with her eyes gazing far beyond into vacant space, begins,—

"'Oh that we two were lying
Under the churchyard sod,
With our hearts at rest in the quiet earth's breast,
And our souls at rest with God!'"

A sudden sob breaks through the sad sweet voice, then it ceases, and the singer starts to her feet, one hand clutching the side of the instrument, the other pressed to her heart as if to still its agonised beats.

No one notices her but Sir Edward Llewellyn, for the little crowd are parting and gathering around a new-comer—a man who stands in the centre of the room, towering in stately height over those present—a man with a sad grave face and heavy lines about the brow and mouth—a man whom the white trembling girl gazing at him now with such terrible yearning agony, had thought laid at rest for ever in

that "quiet earth's breast" of which she had just sung.

No word, no cry does she utter; she only stretches out her hand blindly to Sir Edward, whose anxious gaze has taken in every vestige of the terror, amazement, and relief that have swept in sudden changes over her expressive face. He takes it, and assists her to the nearest seat, placing his own broad, stalwart frame between her and the room, which seems to rock and sway before her dizzy eyes.

"You are ill—faint!" he says, eagerly. "Can I get you anything?"

She only shakes her head; she cannot speak yet.

"Let me be quiet a moment," she gasps at last; "and please stand there."

He obeys without a word. If she had bid him stand on red-hot irons for her relief, he would have done so in his mad infatuation. She is a divinity, a something altogether removed from the ordinary specimens of womankind with whom he has associated. She has

every right to command or use him as she wills. Did he not fall into abject slavery the moment those lovely eyes rested on his face?

By some supreme vigorous effort of self-control Yolande gradually recovers. True, all the colour has left her face, but the frightful look of fear and agony has disappeared too. She glances up gratefully at her silent companion.

"Thank you," she says, simply. "You have done me a great service. Do you think it is possible to get out from here into the garden without all these people seeing us?"

"Nothing easier," he answers. "The conservatory is just behind. It has a glass door leading into the garden. These rooms are certainly very hot."

The conservatory he speaks of is just behind them, and, as she rises, it is only natural she should turn her back on the crowd of people still grouped together at the other end of the long low room. For some moments no

one observes her departure, and then it is her hostess who notices it. Before she has time to inquire of Rose whither her friend has gone, Sir Edward Llewellyn whispers quietly,—

"Miss Merton has a slight headache, and is resting in the conservatory. Please don't notice her absence for a few moments."

Then, ere she can recover from her surprise, the young man moves off, and in another instant is standing beside the new arrival.

"I am pleased to renew our acquaintance, Charteris," he says, drawing him aside in a momentary cessation of the conversation in which he has been obliged to share.

The group disperse; a few more late arrivals enter. Two young ladies burst into a noisy duet from *Semiramide;* and then Charteris finds himself led skilfully into the cosy little retreat where coloured lamps shine soft and dim among the dark-leaved plants and flowery creepers.

"Excuse me one moment; I will be back directly," says the ingenious plotter who at

Yolande's request has brought about this *rencontre;* and he actually takes to his heels and rushes off no one knows, or indeed cares whither, just then, for there, standing under the soft lights, her dark dress falling in statuesque folds about her beautiful figure, her eyes, wide, sorrowful, anxious, resting full upon his wondering face, Denzil Charteris sees Yolande.

He makes one step forward, and then stops, for her face frightens him. It is a moment of such agony and relief that both are dumb for a time. It is she who breaks the spell at last, and her voice so changed from the glad, sweet, soft music that used to ring in his ears with painful sorcery, now reaches him again.

"You are not—dead?" she says.

In all his agony, his relief, his surprise, Denzil Charteris can hardly repress a smile at these words. But they give him strength, and he finds tongue and answers them at once.

"No," he says; it was a cruel mistake—a mistake I have suffered for most terribly in the knowledge of all it has brought upon you!"

The sound of his voice moves her as nothing else could have done. She tries to speak, but no words come at her bidding. A strange pain stirs at her heart, and the old glamour rises quick and glad in every pulse-beat. All the agony, the fear, the shame, the suffering of the past months rush back in vivid remembrance; but in all that remembrance one thought rises sweet and rich and heaven-fraught.

He is not dead; she has no longer to mourn in the heart-broken despair that once was hers. Even as she thinks it, she sees the dark, beloved face gazing yearningly, tenderly on hers. Her mouth quivers, her eyes droop, she clasps her hands over the closed lids to hide the tears she is ashamed for him to see; but, even as she does so, he folds his arms about her and draws her head down upon his breast; and she leans

there helpless, worn, sobbing like a weary child who has at last found a resting-place.

"My darling, my sweetheart," he murmurs, drooping his dark head down to the sunny tresses, every hair of which is precious in his sight, "don't cry so! I know all. Oh, if you only knew with what agony and remorse I have sought you! But our troubles are over now, love—all over, please Heaven. We shall never part again, Yolande; for, after all, I do believe—you love me!"

Love him! Ah, how utterly and intensely he cannot guess!

"You have kept me at arm's-length so long," he goes on presently, as no answer reaches him. "My own precious child, do you even guess what madness and misery you have made me bear? And all the time did you really not care for me, sweetheart?"

She raises her face then—a tearful, blushing face, where a great joy lurks in the shy eyes, the trembling lips.

"Tell me," he entreats, passionately, hold-

ing her still in his arms, but at such a distance that he can read every sign of the lovely tell-tale face which his eager eyes are searching. "Oh, Yolande, surely you have made me suffer enough? Don't torture me more."

She looks up then and meets his eyes, and turns so pale, that he almost fears she will faint.

"Yes; I love you," she says, with a long, long sigh—a sigh that his lips stifle on her own as in trembling incredulous rapture they meet and rest there with a lover's right.

They are quite silent. Heart to heart, lip to lip, they stand; and all the world can give them no more joy, no richer, fuller bliss than just—each other.

But the long trance passes. There is so much to hear, so much to tell; and Yolande learns at last how soon the truth was discovered, how needless has been the sacrifice of these weary months.

"We advertised for you everywhere," says

Denzil at last. "How comes it you never saw or understood we were searching for you?"

"I never looked at a paper," she answers. "When I left home I made up my mind to come here. Mrs Davies was our governess many years ago, and I knew she had come to Wales to keep a school. I was very cautious. I took all sorts of pains to conceal the route I travelled; and when I came here I sent her a note, saying I was in great trouble, and had left home for a time. She was very kind. I told her part of the story—not all; and I got her to give me the place of junior assistant governess in the school. I wrote home once to Enid. I got the letter posted in London through a friend of Mrs Davies."

"And that was how you baffled us, you cruel child!" interrupts her lover. "I searched and sought; I had private detectives on the track of the sister of mercy who had left Colston so secretly—and yet all of no avail. I had despaired of ever finding you when I came here."

"Then you did not know?" asks Yolande, eagerly.

"Certainly not. I never had the faintest suspicion of your being within a hundred miles of me until a few moments ago. I could scarcely believe it was you when Llewellyn— By Jove! where is Llewellyn all this time?"

"I cannot tell," answers Yolande, laughing. "For our sakes, I am glad he is not here."

"So am I," says her lover, fondly. "Oh, my darling, am I dreaming? Can this be really true? Do I really hold you in my arms and hear you say you love me at last —you who have been so cruel, so cold, so—"

"Oh, hush!" she entreats, laying her little white hand on his lips. "Don't spoil our perfect happiness to-night by any memories of the past. You misjudged me, and I—I was proud and hurt and wilful. I shall know you better now, and you—you too will not think such hard and bitter things of me as you thought then, will you?"

"Call me Denzil, and I will promise," he says, drawing her gently to his breast. "I have not once heard my name from your lips, sweetheart."

"Will you, Denzil?" she says, in the sweetest, shyest whisper that ever delighted a lover's ears.

"Never," he answers, passionately,—"never again, my love—never again! Be what you like, do what you like, only love me as you love me now, and earth has no other happiness left with which to bless my life!"

"You care for me — so much?" she questions, tremulously.

"Heaven knows I do!" he answers. "I am not a man of many words, Yolande; but, if every word that love has made eloquent were in my power to speak, they could not tell you more than these three, 'I love you,' mean for me!"

The tears rise to her eyes once more at the loyal tender words. She knows well enough now that this man's very life is in her hands,

and the thought is almost painful in its exceeding joy.

"Surely it is not so late?" she cries, suddenly, as the sound of a clock striking reaches her ears. "What will the people think of us? You must let me go now."

"I must be bribed into doing so then," he says, softly, as he lays his hands on her shoulders and looks with passionate longing at the sweet flower-like face. "Yolande, now that those lips are mine, I could take fifty kisses if I would; but I would rather a thousand times have one—a free gift from yourself. Give it me, my darling, as a seal and pledge of the love you have acknowledged at last!"

For a moment she hesitates. Caresses are rare with Yolande, and no man living, save her father, has ever won one from those exquisite lips. But, as she hesitates, she looks up and meets his eyes; and all doubts, fears, scruples, are forgotten. The imperious passionate face, with all its dark and splendid

beauty marred and haggard by long suffering and weary with long pain, appeals to her more powerfully than any words. She lifts her arms and lays them round his neck and gives him what he has prayed for. Across that perfect moment, when their hearts thrill to the touch of meeting lips, and a great and solemn joy folds them in its trance of rest, comes no shadow of pain, no touch of fear, no whisper of a doom that lies in wait to avenge the very happiness they deem so secure now. But, ah, dear Heaven, the after-years that have still to come will bear no torture stronger, no memory crueller than the memory of this first most perfect kiss!

. . . . . .

When Yolande returns to the drawing-room, she discovers Rose Bertram in earnest and apparently agreeable converse with Sir Edward Llewellyn; and the other people are so engrossed with cards, gossip, and music that her entrance is scarcely noticed. She glides quietly into a seat and there remains, wonder-

ing whether she has not dreamt of the occurrence of the past hour, so strange and bewildering do they seem.

Sir Edward's eyes however quickly note the presence of his divinity, and he grows so restless and *distrait* that all Rose's endeavours to keep up the conversation are futile.

Following the direction of his glances, she discovers Yolande sitting quietly in a curtained nook, her eyes bent on a book in her lap, her face so flushed and radiant that she looks quite unlike the pale drooping girl who left the room half-an-hour ago.

"Oh, there is Miss Merton! Please take me back to her!" cries Rose, springing up suddenly and nearly upsetting the album of celebrities which she and her companion have been discussing.

He obeys her request with such alacrity that, if Rose had been only a little more sharp-sighted, she could not have failed to suspect its cause. As it is, she merrily takes his arm, and a moment after is by Yolande's side once more.

"How are you, dear? Is your headache better?" she asks, anxiously.

"Yes; it is quite gone, I think," says Yolande, making room by her own seat for her friend.

"The rooms are very warm," remarks Sir Edward. "I am not surprised at your having a headache. Is it asking too much to beg the favour of another song, Miss—Miss—"

"Mervyn," says Yolande quietly, as he hesitates, and silencing Rose's surprise by a pressure of her hand. "Thank you. I must beg to be excused. I could not sing any more to-night."

And then suddenly, without any warning, her whole face lights up with the loveliest flush of colour imaginable; and Sir Edward, glancing jealously around, sees Denzil Charteris entering the room by another door. His eyes too seem restless, for they sweep over the room with rapid scrutiny, and finally flash one bright electric glance of gladness and perfect understanding to the girl beside the window.

No wonder Sir Edward's heart sinks, no wonder a strange dim cloud darkens faces and forms before his honest eyes. By some subtle intuition he knows it all now—knows that the service he has rendered these two will be paid back to him in the bitterest sorrow his life has ever known.

"I—I think I must go now," he says, abruptly. "I will wish you good night, Miss Mervyn."

She gives him her hand, and looks up at his pale set face with a look of sweetest gratitude.

"Good night," she says, softly; "and thank you very much, Sir Edward."

Alas, those sweet eyes, that tender look! He mutters some commonplace words, and then hurries away, his heart throbbing with wild irregular pulsations, his brain in a whirl, his mind one wild tumult of confusion. For he has fallen desperately, foolishly, besottedly in love at first sight with "My Lady Coquette."

CHAPTER V.

IT is the day after the party at the rectory, and a little group is congregated in the drawing-room at Llewellyn House. They consist of Mrs Davies, Yolande, and Denzil Charteris.

The whole sad, half-tragic story of Yolande's sufferings and flight has been confessed, and the good schoolmistress has nearly cried her eyes out in sympathy with her favourite's woes.

"You will go home at once, my dear now?" she says, at the conclusion of the narrative; and Denzil immediately answers with lofty confidence,—

"Of course."

"Not 'of course' at all," interposes Yolande, firmly though gently. "It wants six weeks

to the holidays. I will stop here till then. I have undertaken duties which I ought to perform, if only out of consideration to the kind friend who gave me shelter and home when I was in such sore need."

"But, Yolande—" begins Denzil.

"Hush!" she says, softly. "Don't try to break my resolution, please. No one can take the singing class but myself. It would not be fair to the girls to break off now. Besides, six weeks—what is that? I will go home directly we break up. Meanwhile, I shall write to the girls at home and let them know all that has happened."

"I don't see the slightest necessity for any further sacrifice of your health and time, I must say," returns Denzil, looking vexed at her determination. "Mrs Davies might surely excuse you under such very exceptional circumstances."

"That I most certainly would," answers Mrs Davies, heartily. "The decision rests entirely with you, Yolande."

"Then I remain!" she says, quickly. "I can-

not forget what is due to you, and what is fair to the girls. At the very busiest and hardest time of the year I am not going to desert my post and give you a double share of labour. No, Denzil; it is of no use to look cross. My mind is made up. For six weeks longer I shall stay here; after that—"

The glorious look she gives her lover fills up the pause more eloquently than any words. It is impossible to resist it. His gloom vanishes.

"I suppose you must have your way," he says; "but it is hard on me. I daresay Mrs Davies won't admit such a wolf in sheep's clothing within the sacred precincts of her lambs?"

"Under such very exceptional circumstances I cannot be so severe," laughs the kindly old lady. "You may call any day to see Miss Mervyn after four o'clock; and of course she is always free to go to the rectory when she pleases."

"There!" laughs Yolande. "I am sure

you ought to be satisfied, Mr Charteris. But do you really intend to stay here for six weeks more ?"

"I most decidedly do," answers her lover. "I shall not lose sight of you again if I can help it. You have given me trouble enough to discover you ; and, for the future—"

"What a tyrant you are !" interrupts Yolande, with one of those lovely vivid blushes that he likes to raise. "Are you going, Mrs Davies ?"

"Well, my dear," says that considerate matron, pausing at the door to glance at Denzil's grateful face, "you see there is a good deal to do, and—"

"Let me come and help you !" cries Yolande, eagerly, as, utterly unmindful of her lover's frowning brow, she moves towards the door.

"On no account," opposes Mrs Davies, retreating with somewhat suspicious haste. "You must stay and entertain Mr Charteris."

"There — you hear that !" says Denzil, coming forward as the door closes. "You

cruel little darling! Would you actually deny me half-an-hour of your company, when I am to put up with so much of your absence for the next six weeks?"

"I don't want you to get tired of me, you see," replies Yolande, demurely, as she lifts her eyes to his, and then drops them in confusion before the passionate, adoring glance of the dark searching orbs.

"I wish you would give me an opportunity of trying how that could be done," he says, tenderly. "Oh, my love, my queen, how little you know me, how little you guess how I love you!"

He comes close to her now, and holds out his arms entreatingly; but it is a very coy Yolande, who evades the longing invitation.

"No," she says, retreating to the wall; "Mrs Davies told me to entertain you. I am sure she could not have meant anything of —that sort."

"Whether she meant it or not, I certainly intend to have you here," answers her lover,

as he folds her to his heart and stoops his head to hers. "My own, don't play with the fire you have raised. You don't know what I have suffered this long, long time—ever since I first knew you, Yolande, ever since I left that ball where you were queen of beauty, and tried my best, though all in vain, to shut out your lovely bewitching little face from my heart and memory."

"Then you did not want to love me?" asks Yolande, softly, from her hiding-place.

"No," he answers, sternly; "I did not, Heaven knows! But it was my fate, I suppose, Yolande."

"How sorry you must be!" she says, wickedly, as she glances up at the dark, passionate eyes above her.

"So sorry," he says, imprisoning the saucy little face in both his hands and keeping it at his mercy, "that it will take all my lifetime to prove how regretfully I wear your chains. Now, Yolande, make amends for that naughty speech, or I will not let you go."

"What amends do you wish?" she asks, in pretty unconsciousness.

He droops his dark head closer to the lovely blushing face.

"Sweetheart, *you know*," he says, passionately.

After this the conversation becomes somewhat irrational and ridiculous, and only the clanging of the bell for the early school dinner brings them to remembrance of time and its corresponding requirements.

"You must go indeed," says Yolande, holding open the door after some half-a-dozen good-byes have been exchanged.

"And when am I to see you again?" asks Denzil, still detaining the little hand in both his strong warm palms.

"To-morrow."

"Far too long. Can't you come for a walk this afternoon with me."

"Oh, Denzil," she says, rebukingly, "twice in one day! What will the girls think?"

"That they wish they had a chance of

doing the same, most likely," laughs Denzil.

"And that is very bad for them," says Yolande, gravely. "You see, I ought to set an example, Mr Charteris."

"Your first duty is to me," he rejoins, playfully; "I require you more than the girls."

"I think not," she says, laughing. "You have done very well without me so long that you can manage it a little while longer. Now will you let me go, or are you going to make a spectacle of yourself for the benefit of the school? They pass here to go into the dining-room."

"Promise to meet me this afternoon and you shall go," he says.

"What a masterful determined being you are!" pouts Yolande. "I sha'n't be allowed a will of my own soon!"

"I am waiting," he says, calmly; "and I think I hear something dangerously like the 'frou-frou of feminine skirts' in the distance. 'Yes' or 'No'?"

"Yes, then!" cries Yolande, hastily, as she drags her hand away from his detaining grasp.

"Thank you, and good-bye," he says, with calm politeness. "I think I know my way out."

And straightway he opens the hall-door and emerges into the garden just as the clatter of feet and rustle of dresses announce the approach of the girls.

The whole school seem to have a glimmering suspicion that their lovely young governess has a love-affair on hand. Rose has been discretion itself so far, but somehow the fact of the arrival of a gentleman-visitor, and the knowledge that Miss Merton, as they still call her, has been shut up with him in the drawing-room for the best part of an hour are well reported throughout the assembly, and the sight of Yolande's radiant face and sparkling eyes, as she takes her accustomed seat at the table, still further confirms their suspicions.

"It's all right, isn't it?" whispers Rose Bertram to her friend, under cover of the noise made by busy knives and forks. "The prince has come, and they're 'to marry and live happy ever after.'"

"Yes; it's all right," whispers back Yolande. "To-night I will tell you all about it."

"And you're going away, I suppose?" asks Rose, sorrowfully.

"Not till the school breaks up," answers Yolande; and she feels well repaid for the sacrifice she has made as she sees the relief and delight in the faces near her when this determination is made known.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO figures are slowly sauntering along in the dusk of the autumn afternoon. The sky is clear and fair, but the earth is fast showing symptoms of the waning of the year. The few leaves on the far off beech-trees gleam like gold and amber as the sunlight throws its parting rays upon them; but under foot the dead leaves lie in damp and desolate heaps, and the signs of decay are everywhere.

The external gloom of wood and lane however has not the slightest effect upon the two happy idle people wandering along with hand clasped in hand, and eyes that never seem weary of gazing on each other.

"And you were really sorry when you sent

me away?" Denzil Charteris is saying. "Did you care for me then?"

"Yes," answers Yolande, humbly. "I was very wrong, I know; but I thought of how proud and cold you had always been, and of the insult you sent me in that—valentine —and—"

"What are you saying?" he asks, bewildered. "Valentine? I never sent you a valentine in my life!"

"You did not!" she cries, standing still and surveying him with surprise, and a curious shame as well. "You did not send me the very words I heard you quoting to your cousin, on the night of that party at the Hargreaves's, about 'My Lady Coquette?'"

"Certainly not," he answers, sternly. "I should never have been guilty of such an ungentlemanly action."

"Then who could have done it?" cries Yolande, in bewilderment. "Oh, Denzil," she adds, with sudden piteous remorse, "that was the cause of all my behaviour to you! I

thought, as you imagined me so heartless and so bad, you should find your punishment when —that day by the brook—you told me you loved me. I thought my secret would have betrayed itself. I never thought it would be so hard to refuse the love I had resolved to gain only for revenge. Oh, my dear, don't look so sad! I know I was wicked, foolish, vain; but indeed, Denzil, I have suffered bitterly for that one rash, misguided action. It brought its own punishment to my heart and life."

"If I had only known," he says, looking with a strange and wistful sorrow at the beautiful pleading face, "how different the last few months would have been!"

"No regrets can undo the past," Yolande answers, humbly. "We must be thankful that Heaven has enabled us to find out our error in time, Denzil. And you forgive me now, do you not?"

"Forgive you? Yes, a thousand times!" he says, earnestly. "My darling, there is

nothing I would not forgive you, now that I know your love is mine, come what may."

"Yes," she responds, solemnly, laying her hands in his and looking up at his face with such love and truth in her own as makes his heart thrill to read—"yours always now, Denzil, come what may."

"You need not have repeated that, sweetheart," he says, half jealously; "for nothing can come between us now—nothing shall."

"Heaven grant it!" whispers Yolande, all her heart going out to him in the relief of this new-found knowledge. She has never loved him as she loves him at this moment, when the fact of her own misjudgment proves him nobler, truer, braver than she has ever dreamt.

"You do love me, do you not?" he says, tenderly, as though the question were something quite new, as though it had not been asked and answered over and over again each time they have met.

"Love you? Oh, Heaven knows I do," she says, a sob breaking the tender words, for

her whole heart is softened and wrung with bitter penitence at the thought of all her wilfulness and pride have given him to bear—"more than you know, Denzil—more than I ever deemed possible when you told me such bitter truths of myself—once!"

"I was a jealous fool," he returns, humbly. "I feared I would never win you, Yolande; even now I can scarcely believe it, though all night long I have lived upon the memory of your words, upon the thought of your face as it nestled on my breast, until I grew half mad with joy and doubt—one moment fearing that I should never see you again, that this was all some wild and foolish dream!"

"I have thought the same very often," says Yolande. "It seemed impossible, after giving you up as lost for so long a time, to realise your return to me. Oh, Denzil, that awful thought; the fear that in some rash moment you had sought your own death, the remorse of knowing I had driven you to despair! At times I felt a very murderess!"

"My darling," he answers reproachfully, winding his arm round the trembling little figure and drawing her closer to himself in the gathering dusk, "how grieved I am that you should have had such terror and anxiety. And yet perhaps but for that you would not have learned to care for me."

"Would I not?" she questions, tenderly. "I believe I cared for you always, Denzil, from the very first hour I saw you."

"My sweet, my own true little love! Can I ever be thankful enough for such happiness as this?"

"Then you don't mind risking your happiness with a coquette, Denzil?" she asks presently, after a long pause, filled up in lovers' fashion.

"You are not that really, are you?" he asks. "That men should admire and love you is not to be wondered at. Your face is just one of those witching, beguiling faces that live in a man's memory far longer than any regular statuesque beauty. But still, dearest, you

would not try for the gratification of your own vanity to win love, and then cast it aside in selfish disregard of the giver's sufferings? You would not do that, Yolande?"

"Never, never!" she says, earnestly. "That is why I felt your reproaches so bitterly, Denzil; for I hated to think that you had formed such an opinion of me, that you thought I was

> "'Such an unthrift of sweets,
> My favours were but like the wind
> That kisseth everything it meets!'"

"Have you ever kissed any man before?" he asks, suddenly, looking with jealous longing at the sweet crimson lips beside him.

"I am afraid I have," says Yolande, with pretty pretence of candour.

"I suppose so," remarks Denzil gloomily. "I wonder if it would be possible to meet with a girl whose heart had held no lover, whose lips had known no kiss till the man who was to be her husband claimed them for his own?"

"The absence of the lover is feasible," says Yolande, demurely; "but, as for the lips—well, a girl can't answer for their being untouched by male lips so long as father, brothers, and cousins are in existence!"

"Then do you mean that only your father or brother have been before—"

"Before you? Yes," she says, with an arch provoking look that is irresistible.

"You little torment!" he cries, laughing. "Why could you not say that at first? I thought you meant some other fellow—Stapleton perhaps, or—"

"Poor Lance!" interrupts Yolande suddenly. "How long it is since I remembered him! And he was so good and kind in all my trouble!

"He too has been searching the wide world through for your errant little ladyship," says Denzil. "He cares very fondly for you, Yolande."

"Yes, I know," she returns, sadly. "I am so sorry. You see we were just like brother

and sister for so long that I never thought he would turn into a lover. I wish I could cure him. Do you think it possible ?"

"Judging from my own feelings, I should say certainly not," answers Denzil. "Ah, my dear, men are but fools when they love ! It is like the moth who scorches its wings for the sake of the glittering flame, and despite the pain and the scorch, cannot but return as long as the light beguiles it."

"Then you have scorched your wings ?" says Yolande, looking up quickly at the grave face she loves so dearly. "Is it for the first time, Denzil ?"

Even as she asks the question she repents, for he turns deadly pale, and the lines around his mouth grow very stern and sorrowful.

"Do you mean have I ever loved before ?" he says. "You have a right to ask, I suppose. Ah, Yolande, no man reaches my years without some page in his life's history bearing the trace of a woman's handwriting ! There is a dark past in my life that I hate to think of.

I loved—or thought I loved; but the fancy was transient as a breath on a mirror compared with the passion of my heart now. She was as base and unworthy as you are pure and true. Oh, my love, my love, you are not jealous of a shadow that long, long ago fell over my path? Believe me, the love I offered her is not worthy of comparison with that which has grown and blossomed over its cold dead ashes. It is my life, my soul, my very being that I offer to you, Yolande. I could no more go back and take up life where I left it than I could calmly yield you to any man who claimed you from my arms now. Darling, say you believe me!"

"Yes, I believe you," she replies, softly. "I would rather be last than first, for I have you and she has lost you. After all, I suppose a man has always that past into which a woman's eyes must not peer too closely. But, Denzil, my love for you makes me jealous of any other who has felt the touch of your lips, the clasp of your arms. It seems as if even

now a shadow were gliding between us, putting me from your breast with cold and chilling touch, saying, 'Stand back; I had his love first!'"

"My darling, you are fanciful!" he says, earnestly. Why, you shiver even now!" and with a protecting, almost reverent touch, he closes his arms around the slight and trembling figure. "Don't let such thoughts come between us, Yolande. The past is dead and buried. My future is all yours, love, to do with as you will."

"Don't say that, Denzil," she objects, gravely. "It frightens me to think of such a responsibility. And, after all, what am I that you should love me so utterly?"

"You are more to me than any woman on earth. All other love is but a shadow in comparison with what my heart holds for you, my beloved, my idol, my wife!"

As the passionate whisper falls on her ear her doubts and fears fade away utterly. Clasped to his heart, sure of his love, what

harm can touch her now? What power can part them? So she thinks in the depths of her passionate loving soul; so he murmurs too, as in the closing darkness he rests his lips on hers, and in their touch finds entrance to a paradise of bliss such as in all his life he has never entered, nor dreamt of entering.

"When you leave here," he says, presently, "you will not let me wait long for you, Yolande? Somehow it seems as if I could never be quite sure of you until I have you as my very own, safe under my care henceforth. Promise me, darling, that as soon as you go back you will marry me, you will give me what I have never had yet—a home?"

A home—a home with him! How sweet the words sound in her ears! Across their music comes no jingling discord; before the vision they conjure up rises no pale shadow of a woman's vengeful form standing with arms upraised to the starlit heavens murmuring with white and rigid lips a pitiless oath.

"Tell me," he says, as she is still silent.

"Darling, this is no time for coyness or pretence. My whole heart is bared to you; my life is at your mercy. If you are sure of yourself, Yolande, sure that you love me—"

"Love you!" she exclaims, raising her head and looking at the pleading eyes, with tears rising hotly and swiftly in her own. "Indeed, indeed I do! I never thought I could love any man so utterly. It may not be wise or right; Heaven alone knows. But I cannot help myself now. Denzil, I am almost afraid of such love; it is too engrossing, too idolatrous. It is the sort of love that depends so utterly on the fate of the object loved, that something always happens to—to mar it."

"Yolande," he says, his voice hoarse with pain, "don't torture me so! What could happen, save only death, to part us now? Am I not sure of myself? And you, are you not the same?"

"Yes," she says, in the same low thrilling voice, "quite sure; but still—"

"Oh, hush, hush!" he entreats. "I will

not hear it—I cannot. Yolande, if such thoughts as these are to mar our meeting, I will marry you straight off in defiance of Mrs Davies and all your pupils. There!"

"I will not speak of them again," she says, raising an April face of tears and smiles to his. "That terrible threat will drive all such fears away. After all," she goes on thoughtfully, "it is foolish to talk of such dreadful possibilities when we are so happy now. Do you know, Denzil, the night I went to the rectory I had the most horrible presentiment of something that was going to happen. I told Rose I had a great mind to go home on the spot."

"And was it not dreadfully realised?" he asks, tenderly. "Did you not find your terrible ogre had come back in life again to torment you, sweet?"

"Such tormenting as his," she says, fondly, as she lays her cool fair cheek against his hand, "would make me content to verify a good many such presentiments."

"That is a shocking confession, my little enchantress," he observes, taking the sweet face in his two broad palms, and gazing down into the violet depths of her uplifted eyes. "How do you suppose I am to behave myself under such provocation?"

"You have not behaved yourself at all yet," laughs Yolande. "I don't know when you intend to begin. I always thought you such a grave, sensible, stern kind of man. I had no idea you would be so—so—"

"Out with it!" he says, smiling. "Confession is good for the soul, you know. Is it ridiculous, you mean? Well, I daresay I am. But how can I help it? I am only flesh and blood after all, Yolande, and you are bewitching me out of sober reason altogether."

"Well, if you mean me to get home in time for tea," suggests Yolande, "we had better be moving on. I am sure it is late. It is quite dark already."

"And you are quite determined to stay on here for the next six weeks?" he asks,

obeying the hint and moving on with her through the gathering dusk.

"Quite," she answers, earnestly. "Don't you see, Denzil, my very happiness is apt to make me selfish? I have gained so much it seems only right to make some small sacrifice if I can. Even as it is, what have I done above all other women that I should win so great a blessing as—your love?"

"My own," he says, his lips quivering with the emotion her words stir within his heart, "can I not say the same? What am I above all other men that I should have won yours? There are others so far more worthy of you. Even Lance Stapleton, with his honest heart, his brave and generous spirit, his devoted unselfish love, is better deserving of you than I am. Yet you turn from him to me. Sweetheart, you are sure you love me—not him? I am not so brave, so sacrificing, so forgiving. I do believe you are throwing over the good bargain for the bad even now."

"I cannot help that," she answers. "For

good or ill my choice is made. I can but repeat your own words a few moments ago, Denzil. What is any man to me but a shadow, save only you?"

"Heaven bless you for those words!" he says, brokenly. "They are the sweetest music I have ever heard. And, oh, my darling, Heaven grant that in all the years to come you may never have cause to repent them!"

And even then, as the shadows close around them and the autumn wind sighs chilly and mournfully through the leafless trees, they neither see nor feel the darker shadows slowly and surely closing around their love, and breathing with icy breath upon its glowing ardour.

In each heart fear and sorrow are unremembered for a time. What could work harm between them in the first flush of acknowledged love? Ah, what? For the enmity of a scorned and jealous woman is utterly forgotten by both.

CHAPTER VII.

A WEEK has passed. The lovers have made the most of it, even though Yolande has strictly limited their meetings to one a day—made the most of it so far in that they have become more infatuatedly in love than at its commencement, going steadily deeper and deeper into that ocean of bliss which exists for each in every thought, word, touch, look, which is given or received.

The morning of the new week which opens on this fresh page of their history brings also new events in its train. The post-hour arrives, and with it come letters that bring the first shock of that after-trouble which is slowly and surely threatening the lovers' fabric of happiness.

The letters at Llwynpia House are put beside each girl's plate on the breakfast-table, and, when Yolande takes her seat as usual, she finds two for herself—one from Enid, a rapturous excited epistle, brimming over with interjections and dashes, the other from Lance Stapleton. She puts his in her pocket for after-perusal, and then resumes her "Charlotte-like" occupation of cutting bread-and-butter for the assembled girls. She is so happy that her face is unwontedly pleasant to look at. So Josephine Herron whispers to Rose, who is far too happy to note that one among that crowd of smiling merry girls is surveying her with a glance of malicious triumph as she thrusts into her pocket a letter in delicate feminine caligraphy which she has just perused.

To explain why Jane Croft hates Yolande Mervyn would be difficult. There are some natures that instinctively rebel against the beauty, light-heartedness, and fascination of others. When Yolande was but a governess,

this girl hated her and cast every possible slight upon her that she could—hated her for the radiant beauty no sorrow could mar; for the love and worship she gained from every one, high and low, with whom she came in contact; for the gifts she possessed, the talents that were lavishly used in the service of others, talents which all this envious girl's care and plodding could never secure for herself. But she hates her worse than ever now—now when the mantle of romance has glorified her into a heroine in the eyes of her adoring worshippers—now when the theme on every girl's tongue is the wonderful history and happy prospects of the lovely young teacher she has always affected to despise.

It is of no use for Jane Croft to sneer at the prospects, to hint malevolently that girls with false names and accused of strange crimes have no business to be placed in authority over the heads of others; it is of no use to scoff at the pretence of duty which keeps her to her post now that her

story is known, and there no longer exists any necessity for such self-sacrifice—no use. No, for every girl, from the eldest to the youngest, is Yolande's slave, ready and willing to fight against any odds under the championship of their idol.

It wanted but one element more to turn this envious dislike into vicious hatred, and unfortunately that element was soon added —jealousy. This pale, uncomely, silent girl has long nourished a secret passion in her breast for the master of Llewellyn Park. It happened in this wise.

During the previous Christmas holidays Jane was as usual left at school while the girls went to their respective homes. She had no parents, as every one knew, and was being prepared for future governessing at the request of her guardian—a distant relative, who lived in London. Rose Bertram, pitying the lonely girl, who looked so sadly envious of the groups laughing and jesting together while awaiting the respective vehicles

and trains which were to bear them homewards, invited her to Pwym Dyas for the holidays.

The invitation was only too gladly accepted; and, though neither Rose nor Jane liked each other very cordially, they at least managed to get on as well as most girls. The long frost made the prospect of skating very promising. There was a lake at Llewellyn Park, and thither all the neighbouring families went at the invitation of its owner, for the purpose of enjoying their favourite pastime. Jane and Rose, among others, were there daily; and Sir Edward, strange to say, seemed more attentive to the quiet pale-faced Jane than to any other of the blooming, smiling damsels who would so gladly have won his careless and rarely-given attentions. He taught Rose and her friend to skate, and invited them to the Hall for afternoon tea, at which his sister presided. He chatted with them by the library fire in the dusk of the winter evenings, and escorted them home when the torch-light skating was over. All these little favours were given

thoughtlessly enough, not a shade of deeper meaning lurking in their carelessness; but, for all that, Jane made up her mind that the master of Llewellyn Park had fallen a victim to her pale grave face and cultivated intelligence, and from thenceforth her whole heart was given to the task of completing his subjugation. She thought what a triumph it would be when she appeared to her sordid relatives no longer as the pseudo-governess, the despised dependant they had intended her to be, but as Lady Llewellyn of Llewellyn Hall.

For this end she endeavoured to win Rose's careless favour, for this end she sought every rare and difficult-to-be-attained opportunity of throwing herself in Sir Edward's way. On one occasion he had come to the breaking-up party at Llwynpia House, and then again had unfortunately fanned the flame in the quiet girl's breast by singling her out of all the others for his conversation, and two out of the three dances he danced.

It was then with fierce and angry indigna-

tion that Jane learnt from Rose Bertram's careless words that Yolande had captivated this sought-for prize at the rectory party a week previously. All the long pent-up jealousy and dislike of her nature burst into fierce flame, and scarcely could she control her anguish when, on the following Sunday, Sir Edward joined her after afternoon service, and in five minutes' time betrayed to the jealous girl the secret of his foolish heart. It was in vain that she sought to divert conversation into other channels. Do what she would, it always flowed back to Yolande, and in the very hopelessness of his adoration lay its sharpest sting to the girl who loved him.

Had not Yolande her own lover? Was it not sufficient that he should have displayed his mad infatuation for her so openly without her also winning this carefully-guarded treasure from her care? Must she, by means of her fatal beauty, ensnare and delude this foolish victim, whose offering at her shrine was alike unheeded and unrequired?

So it comes to pass that on this morning, when a letter from an almost unknown correspondent lies in her hands, Jane sees the opportunity of at last paying off some of the debt she owes her unconscious rival, and grasps at it with the unscrupulous meanness of a jealous nature.

When the breakfast is over, when prayers are read, and for ten minutes' interval before the school-bell rings, the girls are scattered in groups, chatting, reading, preparing tasks, or finding books and papers, she slips away and hurries off to her room, once more to peruse this strange document.

It is as follows :—

"My dear Miss Croft,—I daresay you will hardly remember me, and, even if you do, will marvel why I should write to you. But, when we met a year ago at Llewellyn Hall—I as a guest of Miss Llewellyn, you as a daily visitor during the skating-season—I learnt that you were staying at Llwynpia

House; and this fact has recurred to my mind in a season of great perplexity. I have just learnt from my cousin, Mr Charteris, that a young lady, a near neighbour of ours, who is connected with a horrible scandal here, and been obliged to leave home in consequence, is at that school as governess. Her name is Yolande Mervyn. Will you do me the great favour of informing me under what circumstances she came there, also whether my cousin, who, I fear, is foolishly infatuated by her pretty face, visits her, and under what pretences? For the credit of our family and name I am anxious to do anything in my power to prevent his entangling himself with a girl who is not likely to be scrupulous in such a matter. I therefore throw myself upon your kindness and discretion to enlighten me. I need hardly say that this is strictly confidential, and that I rely on you to destroy this letter, and any further correspondence on the subject. If there is any means by which I can repay this service I have asked

you to render me, you may command me to the utmost.—Faithfully yours,

"PAULINE RAY."

"*P.S.*—In a letter recently received from Sir Edward Llewellyn, he speaks very highly of you. Indeed, from what I saw at the hall on the occasion of my visit, I am half expecting some news which will call forth my warmest and heartiest congratulations."

When Pauline Ray wrote this letter, she knew, as well as though she had been Jane Croft's confidante, how matters stood between the girl and Sir Edward. Pauline is a woman who never wastes an opportunity, who looks upon life as a game of skill, in which no card is utterly valueless. In her short visit to Llewellyn Park she had read with unerring clearness the state of affairs between her host and one at least of his guests, and with placid amusement had watched the pale strange girl's endeavours to entrap her careless admirer into some more secure and flatter-

ing position. To a looker-on the game was amusing enough; but little did Pauline Ray imagine then what deeper and weightier interests would one day be involved in its performance.

Only when Denzil's curt epistle reached the Priory, and in her torture and fear she set herself to think out the new perplexity in this endless puzzle, did the memory of the previous winter's events flash across her mind, and with the mention of Yolande as a resident at Llwynpia House came also the remembrance that in that very domicile resided a girl whom previous instinct had assured her would be a valuable tool in the hands of a skilful artisan.

The same morning that brings this letter to Jane Croft and lays the train for a base and dastardly plot in her revengeful mind, brings flashing along the wires from the West of England to the South of Wales a message for Denzil Charteris.

He is strolling up and down the rectory

garden, smoking his morning cigar, when a telegram is put into his hands. He looks at the ominous yellow envelope carelessly enough wondering who has thought fit to trouble even this quiet retreat with messages of haste that are rarely welcome. He opens it, after having tossed the messenger half-a-crown for the trouble of bringing it the long distance from the office to the rectory. At the first lines his face changes. The envelope flutters from his hand and falls at his feet unnoticed. Pain, doubt, grief, all sweep in rapid changes over his dark and troubled face. Those few little words mean so much for him now—absence from his darling, anxiety, suspense—Heaven alone knows what.

This is the message :—

"From Mrs Peters, Beechhampton, to Denzil Charteris.—Come at once. She is dying, but quite sane now. She has some terrible secret to confess, which she will tell no one but you."

He says nothing; he only folds up the

paper and puts it into his pocket, and then takes his way back through the garden paths into the house.

He goes straight to the old rector in his study and says abruptly,—

"I must leave to-day. When does the next train go?"

"My dear Charteris," exclaims the rector —he has known him since boyhood, and knows too the secrets and shadows of that troubled past—"What is it? No bad news, I hope?"

"She is dying," he answers, quietly. "Peters has telegraphed. I must go back at once."

"You can't leave till four o'clock now," says his friend. "The early train left half-an-hour ago. You will have to change at Cardiff and then again at Selford. And what about Miss Mervyn, Denzil?"

"I must go to her at once," he answers, sadly. "It is hard to be obliged to leave her now; but it must be done."

"Your duty is here," says the old man laying his hand on the pencilled words that give the address of the sender of the ill-omened missive. "Thank Heaven, Denzil, the burden may be lifted from your heart at last. You will be a freer and a happier man. Have you told Miss Mervyn anything about this?"

"No," replies Denzil, sternly; "I could not. It was no tale for her ears. Thank Heaven, the necessity of such a confession is over now!"

"I fear it is not," remarks the clergyman, thoughtfully. "She cannot die and be buried without some trace of the secret being discovered. How it has been kept so long I cannot imagine. But there, we need not worry ourselves over possibilities now. I see you are in a hurry to be off. I will look after your luggage and you can drive to the Pwym Dyas Station in my trap. You had better have some luncheon now, and then you will have two clear hours still in which to bid fare-

well to your lady love. Come, Denzil, don't look so gloomy; you are not likely to be parted long."

"No; I know that," answers Denzil, sadly; "but I hate to have to leave her now. I feel as if I dared not trust her out of my sight again."

"Come, come, this is more than lovers' folly," says the old rector, laughing. "What can possibly happen? In five weeks she will be going back to you, if in the interim you have not travelled hither once more, a happier and freer man than you are now, Denzil. Ah, there is the luncheon bell! Come, I must insist on your taking some sort of a meal before you go on this long journey; and try to put off that gloomy face, my boy, or you will frighten Miss Mervyn when she sees you."

CHAPTER VIII.

"GOING away? Oh, Denzil, you cannot mean it!"

It is Yolande who says this—Yolande who, standing with her lover in the empty, deserted schoolroom—(all the girls are out walking)—hears his words with a strange sinking at her heart, for they pronounce a fiat of doom, so it seems to her, in this first moment of pain and bewilderment.

"My darling," he answers, taking her in his arms and hiding the sorrowful grieving face on his breast, because it pains him so terribly to read its signs of suffering, "my grief is as great as your own. Nothing but absolute necessity could compel me to leave you now. But, oh, love, there is no appeal! I must go."

"What is it?" she asks, suddenly. "Has anything happened at the Priory, to Mrs Ray, or—Pauline?"

"No, no, no!" he says, impetuously. Do you think they could drag me away from you? Believe me, dearest, it is a stern necessity that compels me to leave you; and don't make the pain of parting harder than it is. If I could tell you, I would."

"You would not suffer me to have a secret from you," she says, raising her white sad face to his, "and yet, Denzil, how many do you keep from me? Why should you demand more trust than you give? Surely I, your betrothed wife, have a right to know what calls you from my side?"

"If you knew, it could only pain you," he answers, in a low earnest voice. "Yolande, it is a story of shame and suffering I cannot —dare not tell. Will you not trust me, darling? Indeed I am acting for the best. If it would make you any happier, if—"

"You need not say more," she interposes,

proudly. "I do not seek to force your confidence. As you told me not long ago, a man's life always has its one page scored by a woman's handwriting; it is a woman who parts us now."

She has withdrawn herself from his arms, and stands in the glow of the firelight, her face pale and proud, her eyes dark and flashing, her whole expression mutinous, wrathful, indignant.

"Yolande," he entreats, his voice going forth in passionate appeal to her heart, but never changing the proud young face from its set and rigid coldness—"Yolande! Oh, Heaven, you would not quarrel with me now?"

There is something so heartwrung and desolate in his voice that it pierces her very soul; but through it all she sees the coming of a cloud over the bright horizon of her perfect dream. She stands with the tears gathering in her eyes and raining down her white cheeks, feeling his kisses on her brow

and lips, hearing his murmurs of penitence and passion and remorse, and yet there is a keen sorrow in her heart, a deeper darkness in the darkening room, a shadow in the glow of fire and flame which leaps up to her face and his, and shows them to each other in this their first moment of distrust and severance and grief.

"Sweetheart," he says, "it is only for a little while I leave you—a few days, a week at most. Do you not believe that nothing but necessity would induce me to take this journey?"

"If you say so, I must believe it," she answers, the cold misery at her heart speaking out in her changed voice, and taking all the bloom and brightness from her changed face.

He does not take her in his arms now. She stands facing him in the firelight, while his proud, passionate, eager gaze is bent on her downcast eyes, and his heart thrills with a strange unregretful joy as he reads in her sorrow for his absence the further certainty of her love.

"It is almost worth the pain to know that she will miss me so," he thinks, for at times even now he can scarcely believe that she does really love him as he loves her.

"Yolande," he says, breaking the painful silence at last, "in an hour I must leave. Are you going to embitter our parting by suspicion and anger? It is not like you, sweetheart, to be so proud and cold."

The pain in his voice breaks down all her defences. She loves him so utterly that she cannot long be cold; she cannot keep him at arm's length, though his want of confidence wound her ever so deeply.

"You are right," she says, looking up at him with passionate eyes. "It is hard enough to part. I have only just learnt what it is to need you, and already you leave me."

"Not for long, Yolande," he returns, tenderly—"not for long, my sweet. And every day and every hour I shall think of you and weary for your dear face, your loving

words, your sweet lips. Shall you miss me even half as much as I shall miss you?"

"You are sure you will come back soon?" she says, trembling, as she leans against his breast and lets him draw her soft arms round his neck in the fashion he loves. "Or must I wait to see you till I go home?"

"Heaven forbid!" he answers, earnestly. "Five weeks, five long desolate weeks without you! I could not bear it, love!"

"You give it to yourself to bear," she says, half jealously. "And you will be with her, while I—"

"What do you mean?" he asks, sternly. "With whom?"

"Pauline," she says, slowly. "And she is so beautiful; and you loved her—once."

"My love, my life!" he murmurs fondly. "And is it that you fear? Do you doubt me so easily? Yolande, be jealous of what you please, of the friends who claim me, the cares that bind me, the duties, necessities, occupations of my life apart from you; but, oh, my

darling, never be jealous of a soulless love, a thing so utterly dead that no grave could hold it in a deeper forgetfulness than a heart that loathes it!"

"But I shall lose you!" she cries in sudden pain. "Every day I have had the joy of looking for your presence; every duty has been the lighter for knowing the hours of leisure would bring you to my side; and now, oh, love, I did not think it would be so hard to have you out of reach of the sound of my voice, the touch of my hand!"

"And think, if it is hard for you, it is doubly hard for me!" he says, with passionate regret. "And yet, sweetheart, it is almost worth this pain to know you really do love me at last."

"I wish I did not, oh, I wish I did not!" she sobs, in a sudden paroxysm of grief and terror as she clings more closely to his arm. "Something is sure to happen when people love like we do, Denzil. It is the calm, even, placid-going affections that prosper and are

blessed. It seems almost wicked to love any one so blindly, idolatrously, so beyond and above all other earthly objects as I love you, as I think you love me!"

"Don't think it, my own; be sure of it, utterly and entirely sure as you are of your existence. And why should it be wrong, Yolande? Has not Heaven given us this capability of loving, and will it not be satisfied? What could part us now? You are not likely to be faithless, beautiful and winning as you are, and dangerous enough to most men's peace of mind. As for myself, the stars above are not more sure and steadfast than my love for you."

"Yes, what could happen?" she asks, slowly; but, even as she says it, a bitter desolate pang strikes through her failing heart. "You trust me, do you not, Denzil?"

"Beyond all things now," he says, with a falter in his strong rich voice. "No one could take you from me, could they?"

"No one," she answers, solemnly—"have I not promised?"

"And you won't flirt while I'm away?" he says, lightly, trying to chase away the shadows from the bright face he loves so dearly. "You know you have made a conquest even here, Yolande. Poor Llewellyn is over head and ears in love with you."

She smiles sadly at his words.

"I am not vain enough to believe that," she answers, gravely; "and don't jest about such subjects any more, Denzil. Since I have learnt what love is myself, I cannot bear to think how lightly I once regarded it. I know now what poor Lance feels, bravely as he tries to hide it in every letter I have from him."

"He corresponds with you still?" Denzil says, with a sharp fierce pang, for which he blames himself the next moment.

"I have heard twice since they knew where I was," she answers.

"And have you told him about me?" asks Denzil.

"No," she says, colouring a little as she sees his disappointment. "I could not. It will be better to say nothing to any one, Denzil, until we are both back there among them. Even then it will be a strange engagement, for poor papa can never know nor bless us while he lives, and, oh, he would have been so happy could he have known how happy his child is at last!"

"Then I am not to tell any one?" questions Denzil, rather coldly.

"Please, no," she says, entreatingly. "I want to tell them myself. I like to keep it between us, Denzil. I do not want our happiness marred by other people's remarks and formal congratulations."

"It shall be as you wish, of course," he observes, "but I should have thought you would like to put your faithful admirer at least out of his misery."

"You are unkind," she answers, proudly. "You know very well, Denzil, that it can make no difference to Lance, because he

knows I never should have married him."

"Forgive me, darling! I believe I am a jealous fool. I know you love me, and that ought to satisfy me; but, oh, Yolande, I shall never feel sure, or safe, or happy, till I hold you to my heart as my own, given me in sight of God and man as that sweetest and holiest of things—a wife."

"Are you so afraid of my slipping away still?" she asks, with one of the old vivid blushes dyeing her cheeks and throat with its soft rose-flush.

"I don't know what I fear any more than you knew yourself a few moments ago," he answers, sadly. "It seems as if my happiness would be too perfect for earth; and yet—oh, how I long and pray for and look forward to it! Surely Heaven cannot deny it!"

"When you come back," she says, dreamily, "how strange it will be to look back on this little parting and tell each other how we

dreaded it! We shall be very happy when we next meet, Denzil; shall we not?"

"Heaven grant it!" he responds, kissing her pale lips again and again. "Darling, the hour is up. I must go now. Say farewell, and tell me once again you love me. It will be the one happiness on whose echoes I must dwell till once again we meet."

"I love you," she says, very solemnly, as though it were some sacred vow that she pronounced. "And, oh, Denzil, do not forget me when we are apart! Do not mistrust me, whatever any one may say! Remember —but, oh, why should I ask you that? Kiss me once more, Denzil, and—let me go."

Only one more meeting of the clinging lips, one more passionate pressure of the trembling hands, and then she knows that for her the world will be all empty and void and cheerless till Heaven sends him back.

CHAPTER IX.

IN the late dusky afternoon a man hurries through the woods which lead to Beechhampton Castle. It is a bleak miserable day, with more of winter than of autumn in the pitiless blasts, with each wild gust blowing the dead leaves about his hurrying feet, till they seem like troops of evil spirits pursuing him in this hour of anxious pain—with a dark black sky overhead, from which fierce rain descends in fitful showers.

He pays little heed to the stormy elements. His face is set and stern; his eyes glance anxiously towards the lifted turrets of the ruins, which rise sharply and distinctly in the grey dusk, a black pile, frowning down in

its dismal solitude upon the man whose ancestors had once held high court within its stately halls.

With the tread of one well accustomed to the deserted ways, he threads the moss-grown paths, and turns up the winding stairway leading to the only unshattered remnant of the once-beautiful building; then he pauses in the archway to strike a light, and from a niche in the wall produces a small lantern. By its feeble illumination he hurries on more swiftly and certainly, till reaching a door, he opens it, and finds himself in the room to which Yolande had once penetrated in her exploration of the ruins. He goes straight up to one spot in the walls, and, touching what seems to be a small iron knob, a panel immediately opens and reveals another room. It is small, but comfortably furnished; the floor is covered with soft rugs, the walls are hung with faded tapestry, the one small window is carefully shrouded and curtained, a fire burns in a tiny grate, beside which a

woman kneels, stirring something in an iron saucepan.

She starts to her feet immediately—a tall lean figure, with a face lined and marked as only a face that has known much sorrow ever is marked, a strange repressed look, visible even now in the calm grey eyes, the pale thin lips.

"You have come, sir. I am glad of it," she says, quietly.

"Yes. I got your telegram only yesterday. I ought to have been here this morning, but the train was so slow. I missed catching the express. Am I—in time?"

"Yes," she says, looking up curiously at his face, as she notes the slight falter in the last two words. You would like to see her now, I suppose? You must be prepared for a great change."

He makes no answer, and she takes the light and quickly leads the way to another room, which is entered in the same secret way as that which they are just leaving.

It is furnished as a bedroom, and, propped up by pillows, on the curtained bed is the wasted, death-marked figure of a woman. Her hands are worn to skin and bone; the long sharp fingers clutch nervously and continuously at the coverlet. Her face is so ghastly and terrible that it is little wonder if Denzil Charteris shudders as he looks on its marred and pallid outlines, remembering what it was once. Her eyes turn piteously, entreatingly towards him; but the look he has dreaded to see no longer lights with lurid vacant flames those large and splendid orbs. He gives a sigh of relief, and his voice is very gentle and courtly as he stoops towards her.

"You know me, Alethea?" he says.

"Denzil!" she cries; and over all the death-like pallor of her face a faint warm colour flushes, like the hue of a faded rose-leaf. "Denzil, I am glad to see you before I die; the end will not be long—now."

Her voice is very weak; the sentences flutter forth only in faint disjointed breaths.

"She has told—me—all," she goes on presently, pointing to the nurse, who gives her some cordial to revive her—"all your goodness—and the burden you—have borne—I cannot thank you; I can only pray Heaven may atone—for the sufferings and shame I have brought upon your head—your name—your life. How you have kept—my secret—I cannot tell. Even in my worst moments—the thought that I was still here—that I was not shut up with others mad—and morbid—as myself—never left me. Since that—day—when you found me bending over the beautiful girl whom I so terrified—I have known—and thought—more than you imagine. I have seen what you must have borne—for my sake and—his—whom I so wronged. The clouds began to clear off my brain—and, as my reason came slowly back, so my bodily health failed; and now—I know earth will not hold me—much longer. But there is something I must tell you before—before it is—too late. It is

about that—pool—in the woods yonder—Denzil—and the—murder!"

"What!" he cries, in amazement—"the place where they found a dead man's body, and wisely decided it was mine?"

"I never heard of that," she says,—"Peters never told me. But I could not speak—of this—of what I had seen—to any one. Who would believe me? And then it was not so clear—as it is now. If I confess all—Denzil, will it be right—will it bring justice to—the guilty?"

"Stay—let me think!" he cries, in bewilderment. "Peters, was Doctor Deane here to-day?"

"No; I am expecting him every moment," answers the nurse.

"Then you must wait till he comes, Alethea," says Denzil, persuasively. "Remember, what you have to say may entail serious responsibilities upon us. Unless certified by proper witnesses, your confession would be useless. The hue-and-cry

about this unknown man is still sounding throughout the country; and I have a deep interest in bringing the matter to some satis factory result, for it involved me and others in deep unhappiness."

"I think this is the doctor, sir," interposes the grave voice of Peters at this juncture; and Denzil, turning with a strange sensation of relief to the opening door, welcomes the hearty, kindly presence of old Doctor Deane.

"Oh, Charteris, so you have come!" says the doctor, cheerfully. "I am glad of it. Our patient has been wearying sadly for sight of you."

But, even as the cheery voice and hand-grasp are heard and felt, Denzil reads in the grave eyes how near the end is. Drawing the old man aside, he whispers hurriedly of the dying woman's desire.

"You can certify as to her sanity now?" he asks, anxiously.

"Yes, with a clear conscience. I always told you that it would end thus—recovery

of reason, loss of life. I am right, you see. But the question is, what sort of state was she in at the time she witnessed, or thought she witnessed, this affair? Might it not be an hallucination of her brain?"

"Peters says her mind has been gradually recovering itself for some three or four months back," answers Denzil.

"Well, we can but hear it," says the doctor, gravely. "It is odd that she should know anything of a matter that has convulsed the country round for so long a time."

Then they approach the bed, and, with grave faces and an ever-deepening wonder in their minds, listen to the strange disjointed confession of the dying woman.

"You have taken it all down?" says Doctor Deane, in a low voice, as he at last lays the exhausted sufferer back on her pillows, and holds to the pale lips the reviving cordial offered by the nurse.

"Yes, every word," answers Denzil, sternly. "If such evidence can be received, that wretch

will soon answer for his crimes and cowardly persecution!"

"Of course you must feel it deeply," the doctor continues, coming round to where the younger man stands, with the paper just signed and witnessed still held firmly in his grasp. "We cannot wonder now that he tried so hard to make use of such an opportunity as your disappearance gave. What a cunningly-contrived plan it was!"

"But the ring—that puzzles me," answers Denzil. "At the inquest it was proved to be my own without doubt. Of course we can allow for the false swearing as to its being drawn off the dead man's finger; but how did it come into the witness's possession?"

"Depend upon it we shall learn that all in good time," replies the doctor. "There is more in this matter than we have yet discovered. And to think that the offices of justice were placed in the hands of such a villain! By Jove, it makes my blood boil to think of it! And then to embroil that poor

girl in the hateful business! The scoundrel! Why, Charteris, no one who saw her face on the day of the inquest will ever forget the history it bore! Such suffering, agony, shame, and all borne with a meekness so uncomplaining, a heroism so noble! There, don't look at me! I'm a foolish old man, and I've known her since she was a baby in arms. It brings the water to my eyes when I think of her on that day."

He turns away as he speaks—turns so suddenly and quickly that he does not remark the agitation his words have aroused in his companion. Presently, when Denzil joins him, he finds him gazing anxiously at the marble face on the pillows—the face which, but for the faint flutter of breath that ever and anon leaves the parted lips, might indeed be the face of one whom death has already claimed for his own.

They stand there, a grave and silent group, each heart stirred into strange sympathy with the mystery of this closing life and the knowledge of its long-borne sufferings.

Then, at a sign from the nurse, Charteris and the doctor go with soft and reverent footsteps into the adjoining room.

"Her life will end in that sleep," Doctor Deane says, gravely. "There will be no pain or struggle."

"It will be well for her at last," remarks Denzil. "What a wrecked and wretched life hers has been! Do you remember how you tried to dissuade me from this plan at first, how you spoke of the suspicions and dangers it would arouse? I think, after all, it was the best."

"It was a courageous attempt on your part. I never thought the secret could have been preserved so well," answers the doctor. "Even now there are difficulties to face—the funeral formalities must be gone through."

"I will have her removed to the Priory," says Denzil, suddenly. "I have nothing to fear from any inquiries now. Every one knew she went abroad. What more natural than that she should return to her old home to die?"

"You should have thought of that sooner," answers Doctor Deane. "To die—yes; but if she be—dead?"

"Have you your carriage here?" asks Denzil, hastily.

"Yes—and that old confidential coachman of mine whom the people call 'unimpeachable.'"

"If she could but bear the journey! It is short," continues Denzil, musingly. "They know I left home. They would not be surprised to see me return with her, because they know I have been in the habit of going to see her—abroad. They all think—"

"I see what you mean," says the doctor, gravely. "But it is such a risk I hardly dare counsel it. It would be better still to say she could not bear the journey. Every one knows that this eccentric Peters has lived like an owl in a church-tower here. You brought the patient hither and summoned me; so it's all fair and above-board. I hope my reputation is sufficient to back up anything I choose to tell the gossips here."

"Yes; that would do very well," answers Denzil. "Poor, unfortunate Alethea! Little did she imagine, when she came to Beechhampton, in the pride and splendour of her bridal pomp, how sad and miserable would be her life, how lonely its close!".

"She has but her own folly to thank for it," remarks Doctor Deane. "Sorry as I feel for her, I cannot forget, Denzil, what shame and sorrow she brought upon your house."

"Let it be forgotten now," is the quiet rejoinder. "I can afford to forget it, for life is bearing promise of happier things at last."

"I am glad to hear you say that," says the old doctor, heartily. "I hope it means that you are going to be a lonely misanthrope no longer, but give your home a mistress, and your cousin a happiness she indeed deserves."

"My—cousin?"—and Denzil looks sternly at the kind old face beaming up to his own in the sincerity of earnest good wishes.

"Yes; it is Mrs Ray, I suppose, you

mean?" replies the doctor, a little surprised at the sudden sternness, almost anger, of his companion's face.

"Certainly not," he says, coldly. "Mrs Ray will never be mistress of the Priory while I live."

"Bless my soul!" utters Doctor Deane, in confusion. "I—I beg ten thousand pardons! You see, it is so generally expected, so confidently looked for, in fact. I—I am surprised."

"Not more so than I am myself," is the cold rejoinder. "I have never given any one cause to imagine Mrs Ray was anything, or would be anything more to me, than a cousin."

"But you were engaged once, you know," says Doctor Deane.

"Can no one ever forget, or suffer me to forget, that wretched farce?" exclaims the young man, passionately. "Her beauty and her wiles deluded me, it is true; but I was too thankful to escape the snare to fall into

it again when later experience had brought wisdom in its train."

"Well, well, you know your own affairs best," says the doctor, still looking a little bewildered. "I only hope you may secure your own happiness. It seems to me that you have been playing at pitch-and-toss with it long enough."

"I think I have secured it at last," answers Denzil, a smile of rapt and perfect content illuminating his handsome face and sunning itself in the dark splendour of eyes that might have looked any woman's heart away.

And the good old doctor, seeing that smile, and knowing only too well what shadows and shipwrecks lie in the past life of the man who at last has won peace and happiness, clasps his hand with a hearty genial pressure that speaks better than words of his true and kindly sympathy.

As they stand there together, hand clasped in hand, the fire-flames glowing on the grave and cordial satisfaction of the one face, on the

rapt and passionate expression that tender memories have left upon the other, both forgetful of all save the words that have meant so much, for all their brief, terse utterance, the dividing door opens softly, and the nurse comes forward into the firelit gloom.

"It is all over," she says.

CHAPTER X.

PAULINE RAY and her mother have just left the dinner-table and settled themselves comfortably by the drawing-room fire, when a loud peal at the entrance door startles them.

"Who can that be at this hour?" exclaims the elder lady, looking in bewilderment at her daughter's pale face. "Not Denzil, surely!"

The words have scarcely passed her lips when her nephew enters, and with him Doctor Deane.

"I am afraid I have surprised you, aunt," says the younger man, hurriedly. "But I had no time to let you know of my coming. The truth is that I received a summons from Alethea, and hastened to obey it, and—"

"You will oblige me, Denzil, by not mentioning that misguided person's name," interrupts his aunt, coldly. "You are acquainted with my aversion to her and its reasons; and I am at a loss to imagine how anything connected with her brings you home so unexpectedly."

"She is coming here," Denzil answers, coldly. "I presume I am sufficiently master of my own house to bring any one I choose hither."

"Coming here!" gasps Mrs Ray, turning paler than her daughter at the shock of the news. "Very well, Denzil; then I leave. The same roof can never shelter Alethea Charteris and myself!"

"It will not be for very long, madam," interposes Doctor Deane, sternly. "The unfortunate lady was coming here only to die; yet even that solace was denied her; for she lies dead at the castle yonder, under the care of the only friend whose fidelity misfortune could not shake."

"Dead!—and at the ruins! What can you mean?" exclaims Pauline. "What could have brought her there?"

"She could not bear the journey hither," answers Doctor Deane, with amazing ease in the assertion. "And you know Peters has chosen to live in that turret yonder ever—ever since her mistress was banished from here. Fortunate it was—for us—as the event has proved. Now, my dear madam," he continues firmly to Mrs Ray, "what you have to do is surely no hard task. A room must be prepared for the unfortunate lady; and Denzil and I are now going to send a carriage to the castle for her. Peters will stay here until the funeral is over—of course it must be as quiet and private as possible. There is nothing you need do, save stay where you are, and prove that you are not quite without feeling, even to one who has wronged you."

Mrs Ray looks ill at ease and troubled at this harangue; but she knows Doctor Deane

of old, and knows too that she cannot offer any objection to Denzil's wishes.

"I—I cannot truthfully say I am sorry for what you tell me," she remarks, presently. "The disgrace brought upon us as a family by that—by my poor nephew's rash marriage is well known. However, there must be no occasion given for further gossip. Make what arrangement you please, Denzil."

"They shall not interfere with your comfort, aunt, I promise you," he answers coldly; and then, with a touch of the hand to Pauline, he leaves the room, accompanied by Doctor Deane.

"There—that is over!" exclaims the old man, thankfully. "It's a mercy she asked no questions, Denzil. Now it only remains for you to select two of the men-servants whom you can depend on; and before morning all will be satisfactorily settled. I will arrange with the undertaker as I go home; and you can have a private service in the chapel yonder. There will be no need for any show or parade."

"By-the-way, Deane," says Denzil, suddenly, as he pauses in the hall and looks quickly at his companion, "where was that body taken after it was disinterred?"

"To Ashbourne Cemetery, of course," answers the doctor. "There it will remain, unknown, unnamed, until some further clue to its identity is furnished."

"I wonder when that will be?" sighs Denzil, heavily. "Oh, doctor, if you only knew how sick I am of tragedies and horrors, you would pity me now!"

"Never mind, my boy; bright days are in store for you," answers the doctor, cheerily. "You have had your share of troubles, Heaven knows! The reverse side of the picture is to come."

"I hope so, I am sure," rejoins Denzil, trying to speak hopefully, but conscious all the time of a settled gloom that seems to be descending on his heart.

"I must write to my darling to-night," he says to himself. "That will cheer me up.

Ah me, how long it seems already since I left her!"

. . . . . .

Tongues would have babbled and gossiped a good deal about the doings at the Priory had it not been for Doctor Deane. Very quietly and skilfully he tells the story of the illness and death of the unfortunate lady who, years before, had been the cause of a terrible and unforgotten tragedy.

No one ever suspects that all these same years she has been in their midst, guarded and protected by the man whose early life her own folly and passion blasted; her wandering fancy, her tottering reason, kept secret from all, and ministered to by the one devoted servant who has attended her from childhood. It was a great risk, and Denzil had known it; but, despite the paroxysms of madness which at times frenzied the distraught brain, she had never been aught but gentle and tractable in the hands of her attendant and himself. A word from

him calmed her in her worst moments; and he had confided his secret to Doctor Deane, and from time to time sought his advice and treatment for the unfortunate woman.

"My brother was the head of the family, and he loved his wife to the verge of insanity. I cannot look upon his tragic end and her worse future and condemn her to that fearful doom you would desire," he said again and again; and, with many a sigh and many a fear, the kind-hearted doctor allowed himself to be won over to Denzil's side, and did his best for the poor suffering creature to whom life could bring no further solace or relief.

When people hear that she lies dead in the stately home whither she had come in the flush and fulness of her girlish beauty, they are not so much surprised as Denzil and his faithful coadjutor anticipated. It was only natural, they thought, that she should have sought refuge there at last—only natural that she should be laid at rest, despite her wrong-doing, in the vaults where all the dead

and gone Charterises lie mouldering in the dust.

So, two days afterwards, she is quietly and reverently laid there, and Doctor Deane, Denzil Charteris, Lance Stapleton, and the clergyman are the only spectators. It is not until after the ceremony is over that Denzil makes the first move in the next part of this strange game of fate which has associated him with the tragedy of murder and death.

Knowing Lance Stapleton's interest in the matter, he draws him aside and tells him of Alethea's confession.

"But how came she there?" is the natural question that follows. "I thought she was abroad."

"Not then," answers Denzil; "she was staying in this neighbourhood."

"But why did she not speak at the time —more especially when there was such a hue-and-cry after you?"

"She knew nothing of that; she was too ill," replies Denzil. "She confessed before

Doctor Deane and myself that she was so terrified at what she had seen she dared not speak of it. Besides, she did not wish any one to know where she was."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," says Lance, eagerly. "I'll take this to Mr Herrick—the lawyer. He has taken a great interest in the matter, and, if any one can get at the root of it, he is the man. He always said there was something suspicious in the way Budd tried to fasten it on to—Yolande."

As he utters that name, he looks up suddenly at his companion's face; and then by some subtle intuition the truth flashes across him. The brightness of his face changes to a fixed settled stupor, with no glint of peace or hope in its dull wistful regard.

"You—she—I mean it is all right—now?" he stammers, confusedly.

"Yes," says Denzil, trying to calm his voice, that its quiver of joy may not grate upon his less fortunate rival's feelings.

"And she is coming back soon?" Lance

continues, turning away his haggard young face, only hoping the misery of this new knowledge is not too apparent in his changed demeanour.

"At Christmas," answers Denzil, quietly.

"Not till then? Ah, well, Heaven bless you both!" he says, hurriedly and unselfishly. "I hope—I am sure you will be happy."

"She asked me not to tell you or any one," says Denzil, gently; "but you guessed it for yourself. You will respect her wishes, though, will you not? She wants to tell Enid and Vi herself."

"I shall not speak of it," he replies, hoarsely. "It is hardly likely. I—I hope you will be married before I come back."

"Come back!" echoes Denzil in surprise. "Why, where are you going?"

"I am going away—to travel. My father has often wished it. I shall be away some time," he says, rather incoherently; and Denzil, knowing his secret so well, has no heart to utter the formal observations that

conventional usage demands. Even while he is trying to collect his scattered thoughts, to say something that will not jar upon the sensitive heart-strings of his companion's generous nature, Lance wrings his hand, and, with a muttered farewell, is gone.

When the door has closed, Denzil stands for long looking out with troubled eyes at the sombre, desolate aspect of the park and grounds.

"How the bitter and sweet are mingled in my cup!" he muses. "I have had a week's happiness; now all is gloom and perplexity once more. Deane declares I must stop here and assist in clearing up this mystery about Budd. Budd has disappeared, and goodness knows where he will be found. My aunt looks like a mute at a funeral every time she sees me. Pauline is as sad as though the cares of the universe had fallen on her shoulders. I have not had a line yet from Yolande, and I did so hope she would have written. If I could only go back to

her, my sweet love! How wasted the hours seem when we are parted!"

A heavy sigh parts his lips; he turns away impatiently and goes out through the hall and opens the entrance door, with some vague purpose of which he is scarcely conscious. Just as his hand is on the latch he glances round and sees the footman entering with the post-bag.

"Any letters, Thompson?" he asks, abruptly.

"Yes, sir;" and the man hands him several envelopes, and then places two other letters on a salver to carry to the ladies. Denzil glances at them. One is addressed to Pauline in a fine clear feminine hand. With a start of surprise, for which he cannot account, he sees that the post-mark is Ystradffelter.

"How can Pauline have a correspondent there?" he thinks, in amazement. "Perhaps, though, it is from Miss Llewellyn."

Then he throws his own letters down unopened. Not one among them bears the

superscription of his darling's hand, and all others seem but a hateful mockery now.

"She might have written," he says, in an endless wearisome refrain. "Three days is time enough. Surely she must know how I am longing for a word or line."

In gloomy discontent he treads the damp paths, scarcely heeding whither his footsteps lead him; but it is with a start of surprise that he finds himself at the chapel, and, obeying the same strange heedless impulse, he enters it, closing the door behind him.

The light comes dimly through the stained-glass windows and falls across the black and white marble of the floor. A deep silence broods everywhere—a solemn peace that harmonises well with Denzil's weary, troubled thoughts, and calms their restlessness by the spell of that perfect stillness.

He seats himself in one of the cushioned pews, and, leaning his head on his folded arms, gives himself up to meditation.

How long a time has passed in that deep

intense thought he does not know; but it seems a long time to him when the opening of the outer door and the soft rustle of a woman's dress rouse him. He starts up and sees Pauline Ray. She comes slowly up the aisle, her black dress trailing behind her, a basket of white flowers in her hands.

With a swift dark flush of pain and surprise mounting to his face, Denzil stands up and confronts her. The start she gives at sight of him is too admirably simulated to render him suspicious of its genuineness.

He steps forward in the gloom and says, wonderingly,—

"You here, Pauline?"

"I came to put some flowers there," she answers, pointing to the vaults.

"Are you so mindful of the dead?" he asks, somewhat bitterly. "I thought no one remembered her or cared for her now."

"I have pitied her always," she says, very gently. "It would be strange indeed if I had not some sympathy with a fate

whose unhappiness so closely resembles my own."

Denzil is silent. He knows only too well what that reproach means, and he is too weary now to argue or evade it.

"You are not afraid to go through those gloomy vaults alone?" he asks, presently.

"Afraid?" cries Pauline, in scorn of such a suggestion. "No; it is not the dead I fear, Denzil!"

"Nevertheless I will accompany you," he says, quietly. "It will be my last opportunity too—for the vaults will be closed to-morrow."

She makes no answer; she only gathers the folds of her soft black gown in one white beautiful hand and moves on slowly by his side, with the last pale rays of dying light falling slantwise through the painted windows above on her fair rich hair.

It is a strange moment for both. Denzil has never given his cousin credit for much sentiment or feeling, and her unwonted re-

membrance of the ill-fated Alethea touches him deeply.

Glancing at her, he sees that she is very pale, that dark violet shadows lie under the drooped lids of her downcast eyes, and that over all her bright and brilliant beauty has fallen some dim and indescribable change. But she is nearer to him and more attractive to him in this sadness and shadow that seems to have fallen upon her than she could ever be in the glorious splendour of the loveliness which long since has lost its charm for his eyes. He does not know what a flame of torture burns in her heart now, what a whirl of fierce, angry, revengeful feeling is surging within her breast, as she walks silently and slowly beside him, fair and calm and stately as some mediæval saint, yet hiding, with all the force of her subtle nature, a secret that is rending her spirit with its terrible fear.

Within the vaults a dim light burns as the two quiet figures move silently through. Around them lies many a dead and gone

member of their race — voiceless, sightless, silent now. The marble that entombs them is not more cold than they — more dead to sense and knowledge and feeling.

Some such thought as this strikes to the heart of the beautiful living woman who strews her flowers upon that last opened space where no name is yet graven to tell the history of its tenant. As the last of the white flowers are scattered in scented profusion over the marble slab, she suddenly drops the basket from her hand, and, falling upon her knees, bursts into bitter, agonised weeping.

It is perfectly natural—it is not done for any effect, being purely and simply the result of heart-wrung agony that at last crushes down the icy, hard-worn composure she has so long displayed. Denzil, to whom a woman's tears are painful in the extreme, looks on in perplexity at this passionate outburst.

"Pauline," he says, gently, "what troubles you? It cannot be grief for — her — that moves you thus."

"No," she answers, wildly, raising her haggard face, all marred by grief and suffering; "it is for myself I weep, who would so thankfully change places with her who lies here below, but who yet must live on and suffer and endure!"

"Is your life so hard to bear?" he asks, but with no tenderness in the cold gentleness of his quiet voice. "It need not be, surely, Pauline?"

She rises to her feet and dashes away the tears from her eyes.

"What it is concerns me only," she says, shivering, as if with sudden cold. "I alone have to bear it till the day comes that brings me rest as it has brought it to—her." Then, with no further word, she raises her basket from the ground and leaves the vaults, he following.

CHAPTER XI.

IT is quite dark when the two cousins leave the chapel and take their way homewards. Both are very silent, for both their hearts are heavy, though with very different reasons for the oppression. Yet their reasons are more nearly allied to one cause than they know or suspect, though Denzil has said nothing to Pauline of his new-formed ties, and she nothing to him of her suspicions respecting them.

"Pauline," he says at last, under cover of the friendly gloom that conceals his agitated face from her quick eyes, "who is your correspondent at Ystradffelter? Do you and Miss Llewellyn write to each other?"

It is well the darkness hides the flush on her

face, the sudden terror of her eyes, as with well-feigned calmness she proceeds to answer him.

"I have one or two correspondents there —friends that I made when staying at the Llewellyns last year."

"Oh, indeed!" says Denzil, rather uncomfortably.

"One of them is a very charming girl," continues Pauline, coolly. "She is rather unfortunate, so far as worldly prospects are concerned, being, in fact, at a school there for the purpose of fitting herself for the duties of teaching. She took a fancy to me when we met at the Hall. She was often there, and knows the Llewellyns well. She writes occasionally still. I mean to get her on if I can. She is just the sort of girl to make her way—clever, quiet, unassuming, and yet amiable and useful."

"What a paragon!" Denzil observes, indifferently. "It is strange, though, for you to turn philanthropist, Pauline. I thought—"

"You thought I was altogether vain and worldly," she interrupts, fiercely. "Yes, I know it very well, Denzil. You need not trouble to tell me again how few womanly, graceful sentiments you credit me with possessing!"

"Indeed, Pauline, you are unjust," he answers, gently. "If I give you credit for less sentiment than you possess, is it not your own fault for always endeavouring to deny the existence of such feeling?"

"There is little enough in my life to call it forth," she says, gloomily. "My heart is very empty."

"Yet there has been little lacking to fill both life and heart. Love, kindness, wealth, station, honour—all these you have possessed."

"Nay, you mistake, Denzil," she answers, softly—"not all."

And something in the tone of the softly-cadenced voice stirs his heart with the faint-remembered music of the past. He knows what want it is that keeps her heart empty

with so much to fill it, her life desolate with so much that might content it.

"Why will she always drift into these memories?" he asks himself, impatiently. "Can a woman never believe that her power is dead, that her spells are broken?"

"Denzil," says his cousin's voice suddenly, "you have not asked the question in your mind. Of course there is some one at Llwynpia House in whom you take an interest, just as I do in my clever Miss Croft. Do you fear to make me a *confidante*, Denzil? Do you really think, oh foolish cousin, that I cannot read your secret, and be glad for your sake?"

Oh, dangerous tremble in the sweet voice! Oh, subtle tremor in the soft hands closing on his own!

"How silent you are!" she goes on presently. "Ah, Denzil, you have not learnt to know me yet! Do you think that, in spite of all that has passed and gone, I can still be so selfish as not to rejoice in your happiness?"

"Pauline," he says, disarmed and deluded, as she had meant him to be, "if I have wronged you, forgive me. My heart is too full of happiness and content to know a single cold or bitter feeling now. We will be friends at last."

And in the cordial pressure of the beautiful supple fingers that meet his own, he seals the bond of a new confidence, and forgets the dangers he dreaded so short a time before.

Half-an-hour later the two cousins are sitting in the warm firelit library together, Pauline resting in a low velvet-cushioned chair, her hand playing lazily with the teaspoon in her cup, her eyes turned towards the dark eager face of her companion as he stands leaning against the mantelpiece.

Presently she withdraws her handkerchief from her pocket, and in doing so lets fall a letter that flutters on to the thick soft carpet and lies there, a speck of white on its dark colouring. A few minutes afterwards she ceases the half-grave, half-playful converse

she has made so alluring to the man who but a short time ago avoided and distrusted her with a prudence that he sadly lacks now.

"I really must go and dress for dinner," she says. "And mamma will be wondering what has become of me all this long afternoon."

"Is it really dressing-time already?" asks Denzil, in surprise, as he opens the door for her. "I could not have believed it."

"Nor I," she says, with a look that is tender and grateful, yet dangerous withal. And then she glides away up the great carved oak staircase, leaving him to return to the library.

The first thing his eye rests on is the letter. He stoops and picks it up. It has no envelope, and the flames, flickering up brightly and suddenly for one brief moment, show him one word that sets every pulse beating with mad wild ecstasy. It is "Yolande." With a strong effort he resists the

temptation so subtly thrown in his way. He crushes the letter in his hand, and with steady resolute step crosses the floor. As he opens the door he sees his cousin hurrying towards him, her face eager and anxious, her eyes fixed intently on his face.

"Denzil," she says, in a voice of strange agitation, "did I drop a letter in the library just now?"

"I was just going to return it to you," he answers, drawing back a pace or two into the room. "Here it is."

She takes it eagerly from his hand; yet he wonders why she follows his backward step and closes the door, thus leaving them both in the room once more.

"You did not— But there—I am foolish to ask. Of course you would not do such a thing," she says in sudden, agitated, disjointed sentences.

"I did not look at it? Is that what you mean?" he says, coldly. "Inadvertently I did. I caught sight of a name—that is all.

But, if you fear I have done anything so dishonourable as to peruse another person's letter, you are mistaken, Pauline."

"Oh, Denzil, you know I could not mean that!" she exclaims, with ever-increasing agitation in her voice. "It was only your happiness I was considering. I was so dreadfully afraid you might have seen or learnt—Oh, what am I saying?"

"I should like to know what you mean by it, at all events," says Denzil, very sternly. "In what way does that letter concern my happiness?"

"Do not ask me!" she cries, passionately. "You would never thank me for opening your eyes. No, Denzil; go blindly on to the end. It is not for me to say a word that will shatter your fool's paradise."

"Pauline," he says, his voice cold and hard, "you have said too much or too little. I insist upon knowing what you mean. If you have guessed my secret—"

"Guessed it!" she interrupts, hastily.

"Oh, Denzil, longer than you have known it yourself have I known of your love for Yolande Mervyn! It is for that reason I will say no word now. You will hate me because I tell you what all who know this girl know, that she is too thorough a coquette to be content with only one slave, even though he gives her such a heart as yours."

As she ceases speaking she turns away and moves softly over the carpeted floor. Before she reaches the door her cousin's voice stays her.

"Stop!" he cries, mastering by a strong effort the storm of anger and distrust awaking in his heart. "Pauline, one word ere you go. You have learnt my secret; learn also that of the woman I love, I believe no ill, no slander. I am as certain of her truth as I am of my own. If any lips condemn her, if any words can shake my faith in her, those lips and words are hers—no other's."

The beautiful woman stands meekly by the

door, her drooping face illumined by a sorrow so deep that it angers him strangely to read it.

"You need not have told me that, Denzil," she says, softly. "Can I not read the trust and confidence of your nature aright? But remember, in any time to come, that I would have done my best to spare you—if you would have let me."

And ere he can quite fathom the meaning of her strange words and looks she has gone.

"What does she mean? What fresh troubles threaten me?" he says, wearily, as he leans against the high oak chimney-piece, resting his aching brow on his hot clasped hands. "She is, she must be, all I imagined. Oh, darling, my darling, what can be coming to me that in my heart there lurks even now the shadow of that old sad fear, the fear that, do what I may, strive how I may, I can never, never be to you what you are to me."

With restless strides he paces the room;

his heart is wrung with wild and miserable fears. If she had only written—if only one word had reached him to tell of her love, her thoughts, it would have been something on which to lean in this moment! What is she doing? he wonders. Are the days long and wearisome to her as to him? Does she already look for his return?

"I will write to her again," he says, suddenly, as he rings for lights and stirs the fire into a bright and cheerful blaze. "I get melancholy and morbid in this gloomy house. Oh, how different every room in it will look when my darling's lovely presence is among them all!"

When lights are brought, he sits down to his writing-table and commences his letter. It is the third he has penned to Yolande since he left her, and he cannot help the soft reproach that steals through its loving sentences and shows the greatness of the disappointment her silence has been. Still the very fact of writing seems to bring her nearer;

the touch of the paper that she will touch sends a swift thrill of delight to his heart. It will go straight from him to her; it will disprove his doubts and fears, and—oh, best and sweetest hope of all!—it will bring back a reply as surely as it goes to seek one.

"There was a cloud between us when we parted, my sweet," he says in conclusion. "You thought I showed a want of confidence in not telling you why I left your side when I would have stayed so gladly. But when we meet again, Yolande, I will tell you all. No secret from this time forth shall ever breathe an hour's distrust between your heart and mine!"

Then, with many a fond and tender word written with lingering hand, as though the task were too sweet to be hastened, he ends the letter, and seals it with his own seal, and lays it on the table, resolving to send the butler in for it, as he does not care to be seen putting it in the post-bag himself. Then with some foolish manly shame, as he

thinks, how the man must wonder at the daily missive bearing ever that one sweet name, he writes two other short business notes as well, and places them over it. At the same moment the second dressing-bell rings and he hurries away, knowing it is more than probable he will keep dinner waiting, and remembering too that Doctor Deane is coming to-night.

When he is safely closeted in his own room, the library door opens softly, and Pauline Ray enters. In a second her eyes discover the little pile of letters on the writing-table. She sweeps across the room and bends over them.

"Just as I thought!" she says to herself. "He has written again!"

She takes the letter to Yolande in her hand and gazes at it as though she could have vented all the rage and fury boiling in her heart on the small innocent-looking missive.

"Can I dare stop it—again?" she says.

Then her hand closes over it, for a step in the hall sounds in her ear.

"It is Thompson with the post-bag," she says; and, quickly extinguishing the light, she conceals herself in the great deep window, drawing the velvet curtains around her.

In another moment, the man enters the room. He goes up to the writing-table, takes the letters and drops them into the post-bag, then stirs the fire, arranges the chairs, and finally leaves the room to solitude once more.

The guilty woman creeps forth from her hiding-place, her face ashy white, her hands trembling.

"It would never have done for me to be found here," she mutters, "in case of any after inquiries."

Quietly watching her opportunity, she slips out of the library and gets back to her own dressing-room without having met any one of the household. Once there, she seats herself at her escritoire, first ringing the bell

that summons her maid. When the girl answers it she finds her mistress sealing a letter, and two or three others lying ready for the post.

"Annetta," she says, hurriedly, "I hope I am in time. I want you to take these and put them into the post-bag."

"Yes, madam; you are quite in time," returns the girl, respectfully. "Thompson was just collecting the letters when your bell rang."

With a sigh of relief her mistress hands her the three missives and sees her leave the room.

"That was well managed," she says. "The girl left me here writing letters and found me here finishing them. No one knows I have left the room."

When the dinner-bell rings she descends the stairs, calm and stately as ever, her black satin dress sweeping around her in the exquisite statuesque folds which an irreproachable *modiste* alone can give, her beauty

even more dazzling by reason of the carmine flush that art has supplied to her cheek, the lustre of her eyes more brilliant by reason of the feverish thoughts within her breast. As she is entering the drawing-room she hears Denzil's voice speaking to the old and trusty butler as he comes through the hall.

"There were some letters in the library, Thompson," he says. "Did you look there?"

"Yes, sir; they have gone," answers the man.

And with a radiant face and lighter heart Denzil Charteris thinks that his letter is already on its way to tell his darling of his unshaken love and fidelity to her.

The evening passes off pleasantly and quietly enough.

Pauline is so dazzling and bewitching that old Doctor Deane marvels more than ever how Denzil can remain heart-whole in the companionship of such a lovely and fascinating woman; and Denzil, by reason of

the new lightness of his heart, is more brilliant in conversation, more gently courteous in his manner to his cousin than he has been for long.

"I shall surely have a letter now," he tells himself over and over again; and to the sweet music of that hope his heart beats more gaily than is its wont. The dark doubts that have distressed him are forgotten.

. . . . . .

The evening is over; the dark night has brought restless slumbers and fevered dreams in its train. The morning comes with its new duties and its new cares; and once more the post brings Denzil Charteris the anguish of disappointment. He has not of course expected an answer to the letter written during the previous evening — it would not be in Yolande's hands till midday; but he knows how his heart has clung to the hope of a word of remembrance in the sick cold pain of knowing that hope again deferred.

Half-an-hour after breakfast he is informed that Mr Herrick has called to see him on important business, and he turns his weary feet to the library with an utter hatred and horror of the task before him.

"I am sorry to trouble you at such an unconventional hour, Mr Charteris," says the old hard-visaged lawyer, rising as the young man enters and bowing gravely in acknowledgment of Denzil's stiff salute; "but Mr Stapleton has put this paper into my hands, and I have of course come to know if you have any objection to my making immediate use of it?"

"Not the slightest. Why should I?" demands Denzil, abruptly.

"You see," goes on the lawyer, coolly, "it might not be pleasant to have the name brought forward so publicly. Of course the man accused here will leave no stone unturned to defy conviction. Are you prepared for what must ensue, Mr Charteris? Are there no secrets connected with this unhappy

lady which you dare not let into the light of outer curiosity and discussion ?"

The young man's pallid face flushes to the very brow.

"My affairs are pretty generally known, it seems," he says, haughtily; "I should scarcely have thought they could have penetrated to your retreat though, Mr Herrick."

"We men of the law hear and see strange things; our only defence is that we can keep a quiet tongue in our heads about the secrets we chance to discover," rejoins the old lawyer.

"You must do your duty of course," says Denzil Charteris, coldly. "I am the last man likely to interfere with you in any measures you adopt. While this poor lady lived I did indeed dread publicity as to her state and condition; but now she is beyond all dread of consequences, all morbid horror of the fate that might have been hers in the years that are past."

"But are you aware of your own risk,

Mr Charteris?" demands the old lawyer. "Were you justified in—in concealing this matter, however well meant your motives?"

"In my own mind I was," answers Denzil, calmly. "It should never have been known if I could have helped it while she lived. Now, of course, my actions must take their natural consequences."

"There would be nothing to fear if it were not for — Budd," says Mr Herrick, meditatively. "But you see, Mr Charteris, what a loophole of escape this offers. 'Why was she in hiding? Why did she not at once make known what she had seen?' will be naturally asked; and you alone know if the answer will be satisfactory. Respected as you are in the county, it will be awkward to have your private motives openly discussed; yet I fail to see how it can be helped. That is why I called on you before taking any steps in the matter."

"You are very kind," is the cold rejoinder; "but, as I have said before, justice must be

rendered to the guilty, and this strange and secret crime fathomed at last. If I had withheld this confession out of selfish consideration to my own feelings, I should have deemed myself as guilty as the criminal himself."

"They say he has gone off to America. Did you know that?" asks Mr Herrick.

"No," answers Denzil; "I have heard nothing of him since I returned."

"That little escapade of yours cost us some trouble in the first instance, Mr Charteris," remarks the lawyer; "and yet we may have cause to be grateful; for, had it not been for that, this discovery would never have been made. Mr Charteris," he goes on grimly, "have you ever pictured to yourself that man's feelings when the dog led him straight on to the last place he would have willingly sought, when before the murderer's sight must have arisen the awful vision of his victim's doom? I don't envy him the sensations of that moment."

"Nor I," answers Denzil, rising as the

lawyer rises, and feeling a half sense of relief that the interview is over.

"From time to time, I shall let you know how affairs go on," says Mr Herrick, wondering why the hand extended to him is so dry and burning, and the handsome face of the young man so careworn and haggard. "You are not going to run away from us again, I hope? Your evidence will be the first we shall require; and you must be within easy distance if possible."

"I was thinking of returning to Wales next week," says Denzil.

"On no account—pray!" exclaims Mr Herrick, anxiously. "It is most important you should be here. We may lay hands on Budd at any moment, and then we shall have to call upon you and Doctor Deane."

"I thought you said the man had gone off to America?" remarks Denzil, with visible annoyance, for he remembers how every delay keeps him from returning to his darling's side.

"It is reported so; but I don't believe it. I am sure he is not so far off as we imagine, or as he would like us to imagine. Well, I won't detain you any longer, Mr Charteris. I see you are impatient. By-the-way, do you know young Stapleton has gone off suddenly? Kamtschatka, or Norway, or some equally delightful region, he told me. Well, good-bye—good-bye!"

CHAPTER XII.

YOLANDE MERVYN sits by the schoolroom fire alone. The girls are out for their afternoon walk, but she has pleaded a bad headache as an excuse for not accompanying them. She looks very weary and pale as she sits in the lonely room; a book she has made a pretence of reading has fallen from her hand, and lies unheeded on the floor; her eyes are gazing wistfully into the heart of the glowing coals, as if at some vision that enthralls her. The clock strikes five, and the sound seems to recall her to herself. She springs to her feet and goes over to the window, looking out from there with cheeks that flush into their old rose-brightness, and a heart that

throbs—oh, so painfully!—with an expectation that is more of fear than hope.

The postman is coming slowly and leisurely up the gravelled walk, and as if he did not carry in his ugly weather-worn leathern bag a score of missives that portend love or grief or joy or ruin to those who await his arrival. With an intensity of eagerness, a heart-sick longing, of which she is perfectly unconscious, Yolande watches his approach with straining eyes. She sees him come up to the door; she hears the servant who answers it jesting and laughing with him; then he goes back again over the garden walks, and she hurries away to ask the question she is so sick of asking; and yet from which she cannot refrain.

The girl comes along to the schoolroom with a packet of letters.

"Two for you, miss," she says, as she meets Yolande's eager gaze. "Shall I light the candles here?"

Yolande utters something, she scarcely knows what, and with trembling fingers

takes the letters. Then she stirs the fire into a brighter blaze and bends down to read the superscriptions. Her heart gives one wild throb, her eyes grow dim with a rush of blinding tears; she feels half suffocated with the vividness and force of passionate emotion called up by the familiar seal and postmark on the letter in her hand.

"At last!" she says. "Oh, thank Heaven, thank Heaven!"

She dallies with her happiness a little while longer, she gazes with such an agony of relief and love at the welcome name, she kisses with tender rapture the still unbroken seal, and then slowly and reverently, with lingering loving touch, she opens and reads her first love-letter.

For a moment the words seem to swim before her eyes, a faint, dizzy bewilderment steals over her senses. A love-letter this—these few cold lines, these rigidly courteous sentences?

"Oh, Heaven!" she wails, and throws her-

self down by the fire, the bright flames of which have shown her only the broken fabric of a dream she has raised to be overthrown.

The very violence of her paroxysm of grief brings as violent a reaction. She springs up hastily, and dashes away the tears from her eyes in bitter scorn of her momentary weakness.

"And it is for this I have waited and longed," she cries in the depths of her poor proud wounded heart—"this cold courteous epistle, that any man might have written to any woman, save only the woman he loves. Is this how he keeps faith with me? Why, his silence was no greater insult than such a pretence of remembrance!" Then, with a gesture of supreme scorn, of passionate disdain, she flings the letter into the flames. "I need not trouble to answer that," she says, fiercely, for her pride and tenderness and love have been cruelly outraged. "If absence has such an effect upon his love, he may give it to one who will value it more

highly than I do. If a week of Pauline Ray's companionship can so easily console him for my absence, let him return to his allegiance to her. I will have all or nothing."

Breaking in upon the storm of passionate feeling come now the laughter and chatter of the girls returning from their walk. With a violent effort Yolande endeavours to compose herself and answer their questions as to her headache. But the incessant chatter almost maddens her; and the knowledge that her flushed cheeks and swollen eyes are objects of notice and whispered remarks, in no way tends to soothe her ruffled spirits.

Making some hasty excuse, she at last breaks from the throng, and leaves the room. Crossing the passage that leads to the staircase, her eye falls upon the second letter, which she still holds in her hand. It is addressed in unknown writing; but she pauses under the lamp and opens it.

It is an invitation from Miss Llewellyn, of Llewellyn Park, asking her to spend

Saturday and Sunday with her, and bring her friend Rose Bertram also. As Yolande has only once met the kind old maiden mistress of the Hall, she is greatly surprised at the invitation. Her first impulse is to refuse it; and then her pride steps in again and offers counsel to her own future undoing.

"Why should I not enjoy myself while I can?" she thinks. "If he can so easily forget, I need not hesitate to try to follow his example."

That evening Yolande despatches two missives. One is to Miss Llewellyn, accepting her invitation with many thanks, the other to Denzil Charteris at Beechhampton.

It reaches him safely enough the next day; and, after all his misery and anguish, this is the reward he gets,—

"My dear Denzil,—I duly received your letter, informing me of your arrival at Beechhampton. Pray do not hurry back here on

my account; there is not the slightest necessity. I am perfectly well, and looking forward with great pleasure to a visit to Llewellyn Park, where I have been invited for a few days. I think, as I shall so soon be home, it is very unnecessary for you to take the trouble of the long journey to Wales again. Doubtless we shall meet quite soon enough. If you see Lance Stapleton, tell him, with my love, that I shall write from Llewellyn Park in answer to his letter.—Yours affectionately, YOLANDE MERVYN."

With an increasing bewilderment that would be ludicrous if it were not so deep and so earnest, Denzil Charteris reads this cool production.

The post comes in at breakfast-time, and Pauline Ray sits opposite him at the table, watching with covert intentness every change of his face, from surprise and incredulity to shame and anger.

"So this is the answer she sends to my

loving words!" he thinks, as he crushes the letter in his strong grasp. "It is for this I have hoped and longed and lingered."

He sits staring blankly at his plate, unconscious of all other presence, stabbed to the heart by the violence of this shock, wondering dimly and dreamily to himself whether it is possible that the same girl whose lips have touched his own, whose tears have fallen on his breast, can indeed have penned these cruel, heartless lines. He knows that she has distrusted him once—he knows that she was proud and angry when he refused to give her the reasons of his absence; but he has never dreamt of such retaliation as this. He thinks of the three letters he has written to her since their parting, especially the last one, in which his heart showed all its weakness, its longing, its love.

"And this is how she receives it!" he says again.

And now despair and disbelief give way

to fierce fury. He remembers the character of this girl, and how he had always known and mistrusted her; he remembers the inherent coquetry of her disposition, and his own jesting words that Llewellyn was over head and ears in love with her. What can he think but that she has gone to subjugate a new admirer—to cast her chains around another victim? She has stabbed him in the one weak place of his armour of trust —for Denzil Charteris is a fiercely jealous man, and hates to think that one smile, one look of the tender witching eyes he loves is lavished upon another, that the pretty ways, the irresistible fascinations this girl possesses are only coquetries displayed to all men alike. He has always heard it said of her, he believed it himself for long; but love had suddenly blinded him, and he too had been ensnared.

In this hour his love changes as he himself could scarcely have thought it would change; jealousy, fury, disappointment, pride

—all the demons that in our weakest and worst moments fight so mercilessly for our subjugation — all these feelings sweep over him in fiery torrents. He rises from the table, neither remembering nor caring to remember his cousin's presence, and rushes away to solitude as the wounded stag rushes to the thicket to bear the agony of the hunter's shot unseen, unpitied.

The beautiful guilty woman at the head of the table watches him with pitiless calmness. That all his fabric of happiness is laid in dust and ashes at his feet is nothing to her.

"It works well," she says, when she is at last alone, a guilty joy in her heart, a passionate exultation in her voice. "Now I have but to wait a few days more and—the prize is mine!"

. . . . . .

Despite all Yolande's efforts and struggles, it is no easy matter to hide the suffering she is enduring, and her visit to Llewellyn Park

opens drearily enough. There are a few people there, and she is conscious of being introduced to them, and of laughing and talking and behaving much as she generally does; but there is a strange, dull, heavy feeling at her heart, and an indescribable and ever-recurring sensation that she is somebody else, looking on at herself and wondering vacantly why this bright-faced, jesting girl should carry on her shoulders so heavy and wearisome a burden.

After luncheon a drive is proposed, and Sir Edward Llewellyn, who has been hovering devotedly around Yolande since she set foot in his ancestral halls, begs her to let him drive Rose and herself. The girl agrees languidly enough. It is absolutely nothing to her whom she accompanies; but she believes that Rose Bertram prefers Sir Edward's society to that of any other of the young men at the Hall, and so thinks it will at least please her.

Owing to a misunderstanding regarding the

time, Yolande does not come downstairs until a quarter of an hour later than the rest of the driving-party; and, to her surprise, she sees the various vehicles disappearing rapidly down the avenue—all except one at least; for as she stands hesitating, pale and bewildered, Sir Edward approaches, leading a tall rakish-looking chestnut, attached to a vehicle so high and narrow that Yolande regards it with absolute dread.

"Am I to go in that?" she cries, disappointedly. "And where is Rose?"

"She has gone on," answers Sir Edward, looking rather distressed at Yolande's want of appreciation of his favourite steed Highflyer. "We are to meet her at our rendezvous. Come, Miss Mervyn, don't look so alarmed! The chestnut's quite quiet, I assure you."

"But he looks so terribly fidgety," remarks Yolande, drawing back from the prancing fore-legs, which seem fonder of pawing the air than resting on mother earth.

"Oh, I assure you he's perfectly quiet!"

answers Sir Edward reassuringly, as he beckons one of the grooms to come to the animal's head while he steps forward to assist Yolande into the vehicle. "He's only a little fresh. In a few minutes he'll go as quiet as a lamb."

Yolande has grievous doubts on the subject, feeling perfectly certain that there is nothing lamb-like in the nature of this fiery steed.

"Ah, well, I suppose one can but die once!" she says as she takes her seat with some little difficulty, owing to the restless caperings of Highflyer. "Still, if I had my choice, I would rather not have my neck broken as the means of exit from this life."

"Do you think, if there was any risk of such a thing, I would allow you to be here?" asks her companion, so tenderly that Yolande starts back with sharp and sudden fear, from his down-bent face. Tones and accents of this description fall too freshly on her tortured heart to be anything but unwelcome—almost hateful.

"Please attend to your duties as driver, Sir Edward," she says, coldly. "This is no time to discuss my fears or your motives for calling them forth."

This sharp rebuff recalls Sir Edward to himself; and for the next ten minutes there is absolute silence between the two.

"It was too bad of Rose to desert me in this manner!" exclaims Yolande at last, feeling that it is better to make some effort at conversation than to drive along in sulky silence.

"Are you so very averse to my companionship that you grudge me half-an-hour of your own?" he asks.

"Oh, no!" answers the girl, in surprise. "You surely don't think me so rude as to mean that? But, as Rose had agreed—"

"Yes, I altered that agreement," he interrupts. "I wanted a few perfect moments out of all the wretched many that I have still to spend, I suppose."

"I should have imagined you were the

last person in the world to complain of being wretched," answers Yolande, coldly; for she has no desire to drift into the style of conversation such remarks as these usually lead to—at least in her experience.

"Should you?" he questions. "Well, it is my own fault, I suppose, if I am."

"Don't you think you are very foolish, then?" asks the girl, quietly. "Why should you voluntarily make yourself wretched?"

"Because I can't help it," he says, passionately. "I was happy enough and contented enough a little while ago; but Heaven knows what is the matter now! I have lost all inclination for anything I used to enjoy!"

"Perhaps you are dyspeptic," suggests Yolande, politely.

He looks at her in angry bewilderment.

"I have never had a day's illness in my life," he says, coldly.

"Oh, indeed! How fortunate!" is the rejoinder. "Sir Edward, what do you call this vehicle?"

"A dog-cart. You don't mean to say you didn't know what it was?"

"I wasn't quite sure. Isn't your horse going rather fast?" she asks, nervously. "We seem so high up here."

"There is no occasion for you to be uneasy," he says, quietly. "I am perfectly accustomed to driving."

"You are very fond of horses, I suppose?" asks Yolande, looking straight ahead and inwardly wishing he would not stare at her quite so hard.

"Yes," he says, rather absently. "That is to say, not very. I am not a man who finds his height of bliss in hunting, or steeplechasing, or amusements of that description. I like a quiet life, though I have seen a good deal of the world besides this place."

"And now are you going to settle down here?" queries Yolande.

"I don't know. You see it is dull being here by oneself."

"But you are not by yourself," rejoins

Yolande. "You have your sister and lots of friends. I am sure you ought not to complain of dulness. Besides, you said just now you liked a quiet life."

"I see I must mind my 'p's' and 'q's' when I talk to you," he says, with a faint smile.

"Have you ever wondered why those two letters should have been singled out of the other twenty-six for the meaning your sentence gives them?" asks his companion, musingly. "Why can't people say 'i's' and 'u's,' or 'w's' and 'v's'? We don't use 'p' and 'q' more frequently than any other letters, do we?"

"No—unless it's something to do with 'particular.' There are 'p' and 'q' in that, you know," hazards Sir Edward, with a feeble attempt at wit.

"I don't see the 'q,'" answers Yolande, laughing. "I decline to look upon it as mere matter of punning or pronunciation. No, Sir Edward; you ought to find a better reason than that."

Her companion looks as if he were about to say something, then evidently is unable to make up his mind as to what it had best be, and so turns his eyes once more on his curveting steed, who is tossing his head and snorting defiance at every cloud of leaves the wind whirls around his feet.

"I suppose you are not much impressed with the beauties of Wales?" asks Sir Edward, presently.

"Not this part of it certainly," says Yolande. "But it is just as well I have not been too charmed, for I am going to leave it soon."

"Ah, yes, I forgot! How I wish— But I suppose it's impossible. Don't you think, Miss Mervyn, that there are some people in the world whom it would be better not to see at all, than to see and lose ever after?"

"I can't say I have ever thought about the subject," answers Yolande, philosophically. "I will give it due consideration and let you know."

"Don't laugh at me," he says, earnestly. "Indeed I am serious enough. I often wish I had never seen you; for now—"

"Now you will certainly have that steed of yours bolting if you don't hold him in a little more firmly," interposes Yolande, hastily. "Please don't talk nonsense, Sir Edward, even if it is uncomplimentary. It is of no use to wish you hadn't seen me, when here I am sitting by your side, with a twelve-mile drive in prospect. However, I will efface myself as much as possible for the rest of the journey; and, if you only look straight before you, it will be easy to forget I am here."

"You know I did not mean that!" he says, angrily. "I am a bad hand at expressing myself, I know; but still I could not be so rude as you make out. What I mean is—"

"Never mind what you mean or meant," she interrupts. "Sir Edward, you are not doing your duty as *cicerone*. Why don't you point out to me the places of interest,

or describe the landmarks we pass so regardlessly?"

"They are nothing particular, and, even if they were, I do not feel inclined for the task," he says, huffily.

"So it seems," is the placid rejoinder. "How selfish men are! They won't even talk of things that they don't care about, much less do them!"

"I would talk of something I care about very much if you would let me."

"There is a toll-gate," remarks Yolande. "And isn't that one of the other carriages before us, Sir Edward?" she adds, eagerly.

"Yes, I think so."

"We shall soon reach it then," says Yolande. "Why, Sir Edward, where are you going?"

"Don't you see the gate's shut? The railway passes close by here," answers her companion. "By Jove, there's the smoke! We shall see the train in a minute."

He draws rein as he speaks, and the un-

willing chestnut plunges and prances and shows every sign of equine displeasure at the sudden termination to his sharp trot.

"The train won't frighten him, I hope?" says Yolande, timidly, for she has not yet got over her vague distrust of the spirited animal.

"Oh, no!" answers Sir Edward, reassuringly. "Woa, Highflyer; steady, old boy!" he goes on soothingly.

But the animal puts back his quivering ears and snorts defiantly.

Suddenly the sharp shriek of the whistle cuts through the air, and the red lamps flash through the gathering dusk; then, roaring, puffing, snorting like some devouring monster, the train dashes by and plunges into the darkness of an adjoining tunnel.

It seems only a second since Yolande has seen it, only a second since the red lights flashed through the cold dim air; and then she is conscious of a rearing, plunging horse standing bolt upright and pawing the air

with frantic hoofs, of a low muttered exclamation from her companion's lips, a faint shriek from her own, and she is being whirled along through the dusky autumn gloom, while trees and hedges, and bare black fields and stretching roads, and white, straight signal-posts all race and fly before them in one giddy, furious whirl.

CHAPTER XIII.

"SIT still, for Heaven's sake!" says a man's voice, hoarse and low with an exceeding fear.

Faint and ill with the rapid motion, Yolande closes her eyes, and clutches the side of the dog-cart with one hand and the back of her seat with the other. Like a flash of lightning comes back the memory of all the love, joy, sorrow, trouble of her life. She finds herself wondering whether she will be killed, and, if so, whether Denzil will be very sorry when he hears of it. She does not address a single word to her companion—she only sits still, pale, motionless, a lovely statue of fear and resignation.

The man beside her is straining with giant

strength at the iron-mouthed brute who holds their lives at his mercy. After one quick agonised glance at her face he gives no other; only, with a passionate half-breathed prayer, he bends all the force of will and muscle in this fight for conquest.

The long white road stretches before them, and down it they fly at racing speed. The bleak landscape hurries along like a gaunt shadow; fields are replaced by trees, hedges by banks, elm-tree boles by cottage-gardens, and still on and on goes the horse in his wild unchecked career, caring no more for the hand on the reins than if it were a child's, mad with a wild, free sense of liberty, —rushing on, on, on, as though to the goal it sought were no limits, to the limbs and frame of the seeker was no fatigue.

It may have been hours, minutes, seconds —Yolande does not know which—when there comes a crash, followed immediately by a stunned, dazed feeling on her own part; then all is dark and silent for a space. It may

be long or short—she cannot tell; for her spirit floats off into some misty dreamland, and she is as unconscious of the pains, dangers, or sensations of the body as if it had nothing whatever to do with her.

When she does come back to consciousness, however, she finds herself supported in a man's strong, tender arms; a voice, broken and unsteady from a great fear and a great lovingness, is calling on her name. Somehow it does not seem strange or even a liberty in such a moment as this; and for a few seconds more she leans against his strong broad shoulder, wondering how it is she is alive still.

"Are you hurt?" he asks, anxiously. "The hedge broke our fall, I know; but do try to tell me if you're injured. Oh, Heaven! how shall I ever forgive myself for putting you into such danger?"

"I told you—I was afraid—of the chestnut," says Yolande, with a strange hysterical little laugh as she draws herself away from

his arms and sits upright. "Don't look so anxious," she goes on. "I daresay I am all right—only shaken."

"You are sure? Oh, how thankful I am!" And Yolande thinks that in all her life she has never seen such radiant gratitude on any face as on his.

"What is to be done now?" she asks, dismally. "Where are we?"

"In a field at present," he answers, rising from his knees and looking about him.

"And where is that adorable steed?" asks Yolande, mischievously.

"The brute!" mutters its owner, savagely. "I shall sell him to-morrow."

"Thank goodness I'm not an intending purchaser!" exclaims Yolande, heartily; then, suddenly putting her hand to her head, she cries—"Why, where is my hat?"

"In the hedge, I'm afraid," answers her companion, ruefully. "I'll go and look for it, if you like."

"Well, help me up first," says Yolande. "I want to feel if I can stand again."

He gives her both his hands; and she finds herself bruised and shaken and slightly unsteady from the effects of her fall, but otherwise not hurt. After a few moments' search the hat is found, and Yolande replaces it, in a slightly crushed condition, on her ruffled tresses.

"Fortunately for us the wheel caught, and that checked the horse's speed for an instant; but of course we were both thrown out directly," says Sir Edward.

"It's a mercy we're not killed!" remarks Yolande, turning very pale as the memory of the furious race comes back to her mind. "The question is, what are we to do now? Are we far from the Hall?"

"I am afraid so," answers her companion, anxiously, as he glances around the fast-darkening landscape; for, though it is not yet five o'clock, the evening shadows are falling, and the last rays of daylight are scarcely

visible behind the range of mountains to the west.

"How many miles, do you think?" pursues Yolande.

"Ten at least," he says, regretfully. "I suppose you are not equal to walking that?"

"I must do my best," answers the girl, brightly. "We can't stay here—that's very evident. I suppose there is no chance of any of the other carriages overtaking us?"

"I fear not. You see they are to go home by the Llanfyrterm road—quite in the opposite direction. But, if we come up to a cottage, you might rest there, while I send a message to the Hall for a trap, mightn't you?"

"Yes," answers Yolande. "I must say I don't feel equal to much walking. Haven't I a bump or scratch or something on my forehead?" she asks, suddenly, as she turns her face to him.

"Indeed you have," he says, sorrowfully and concernedly. "But, if you have no worse

injury than that to complain of, I shall be very thankful."

"Did you escape equally well?" asks Yolande, remembering him for the first time. "Why, what is the matter with your arm?"

"I am afraid it is fractured or broken," he says, calmly. "I fell rather heavily on it."

"And all this time you have never said a word!" exclaims Yolande, reproachfully. "Does it pain you much?"

"Not half so much as the knowledge of your danger and discomfort," he answers, earnestly. "How you must wish you had never come out with me!"

This is so exactly what Yolande does wish and has been wishing for some time past, that the faint disclaimer politeness demands is very weak indeed.

They walk along silently and drearily, looking in vain for sight of lights or habitation. Presently, as the darkness settles down more completely, a faint drizzle sets in, and adds

still further to the discomfort of the weary pedestrians.

Poor Sir Edward is in an agony of self-reproach and misery. Every glance he gives at the pale distressed face beside him adds a fresh pang of torture to those his heart already endure.

"Are you cold?" he asks, suddenly, as she shivers.

"Yes, I am indeed; this sort of damp mist always chills one more than a downright good shower."

"And our umbrellas and wraps are all in that infernal machine!" he mutters, savagely. "Here, stay—let me wrap this round you."

He begins unbuttoning his great-coat as he speaks, and, despite all Yolande's prayers and entreaties, wraps it in a moment round the slight young figure.

"You must have it!" he says, authoritatively. "Good Heaven, child, don't you know that if you got ill or took cold, as well as enduring all the discomforts of such a

spill, I should be ready to cut my throat for grief?"

"That would in no way mend matters," says Yolande, coldly. "Why do you talk in that absurd way? If there is one thing I detest, it is exaggerated speeches!"

"I am very unfortunate to be always offending you," returns her companion, humbly. "I wish you would tell me how to please you; I would give a great deal to do it."

The colour spreads slowly over her face; her heart aches with a bitter indignation.

"I think if you let me alone and did not talk I should like it," she says at last.

"That is one of your cruel speeches, Miss Mervyn. If you only knew how they hurt me, I think you would be a little more merciful."

"Is not that a light—there?" cries the girl, suddenly. "Look—shining just behind that group of trees!"

"I see," he says, quickly. "Yes, it certainly is. Here is a field-path leading to it. I think it is one of the farms near

Pwym Dyas; that dark pile there to the right is the ruins of the old church. Well, you will soon be able to rest now. Once at the farm, I can send a message to the Hall, and they will let us have a trap in an hour or so. Are you very tired?"

"Indeed I am," answers the girl, wearily. "If you only knew how I long for the sight of a fire and a chair beside it! Isn't it odd how little we appreciate the every-day comforts of life when they are around us? It is only when we lose them that we feel what a loss they are."

"True," he says, curtly, with a long lingering glance at the beautiful wistful face and a strange wonder at his heart if any loss she has sustained throws so deep a shadow over its beauty. "I wonder which is worst," he adds, presently, as they still bend their steadfast steps towards that beacon light, "to sustain a loss, or to long for something too unattainable even for the chance of possessing and losing it?"

"You are fond of propounding psychological questions, are you not?" laughs Yolande, her spirits rising now that every step brings them nearer and nearer to the welcome glimmer which promises the rest and warmth she so sorely needs. "Do you think them out and then answer them?"

"I wish I could answer, or get you to answer, one," he says, sadly.

"I am not learned enough. Don't ask me anything so dreadful," she returns, nervously.

"You need not be learned. It is a very simple one," he says, with a heavy sigh; "but it holds all that can make my life as bright as it is dark now, in its meaning and reply."

"Then I am sure I can have nothing to do with it," she answers, coldly.

"And if you had?" he asks.

"It is impossible for me to answer such an impossible conjecture."

"I wonder," he says, drearily, after a long pause that follows those last distracting words,

"why it is so difficult for me to gain your friendship? I never seem to come a step nearer, and yet I am sure I try hard enough."

"Perhaps that is the reason," answers Yolande, coolly. "One of the things that do not come for the trying is liking."

"Or love," he adds, slowly. "I could wait so long, so patiently, for such a hope as that; but I fear is is quite impossible."

"Quite," says the girl gently; "so please don't think about it."

"I should have to change my whole nature then," he remarks, very sadly. "I cannot tell you how strange a fascination your presence has had for me from the very first moment I beheld you—the moment that

> **'I lifted up my eyes,**
> **And loved you with the love that is my doom.'"**

"Oh, don't talk so!" entreats Yolande. "It is not fair or kind of you to take advantage of a time like this; besides"—and her voice

breaks into a half sob, so weak and weary and desolate does she feel—"besides, I must not listen to any such words, save from the lips of one man only."

"Is that true?" he asks, fiercely, staying her passage for a moment and gazing down from his tall height into the sorrowful weeping face. "Are you engaged?"

"I was," she says, in confusion. "I mean —yes—you have no right to ask!"

"I have the right of knowing I love you beyond and above all other things that life holds," he says, with ever-increasing earnestness. "But, if you have promised—"

"I have!" she answers, her face growing whiter, her eyes full of fear and pain and passionate regrets. "And, even if I had not, Sir Edward, I cannot give to any other what is already—given."

"Is it so?" he says, and drops her hand and turns and walks on by her side. "Then I am indeed of all men the most miserable!"

She is quite silent.

For a moment she wonders, with that strange hysterical mirth that sometimes touches the borders of the sadest moments of life, how it was that the Widow Malone managed her score of lovers when she finds even three beyond her powers. She is very sorry for the man beside her, so easily won, so utterly undesired, the man for whom so many women have sighed and ogled and spread their snares; and yet she, who has never cared, or wanted him, is the successful fowler.

"I was a fool to think of this, I suppose?" he says, presently. "And yet I could not help telling you how dearly I love you. Even now I cannot help saying that, if at any time, in any moment, things altered, and you were free once more, I should never give up hope. No coldness of yours can discourage me. A love so faithful, so much apart from every thought or feeling of selfishness, a love that gives my life to your service, that is yours to order or control as you deem best, most surely in the end be of a little value

in your sight; and that is better than nothing."

"It is of value indeed," returns the girl, with deep and bitter pain; "but I am so sorry that you should have thought of me in just the one way that is impossible for me to answer."

"And it will be impossible—always?" he asks with passionate earnestness in his strangely-shaken tones.

"Always," says the girl softly, but so firmly that he knows no further assurance is needed to tell of the utter hopelessness of hope.

He makes no complaint, though all the dreamt-of beauty and brightness die out of his heart and leave him gazing blankly at a future where all he craves and idolises is shut out from his possession, making only the paradise of another, blessing it with all the wealth of joy he has lost so utterly. Some sympathy with his pain and suffering keeps Yolande silent too. She has learnt for her-

self how much of bitterness lurks in the sweet and sparkling cup of love; and she pities most intensely the man who walks so quietly and bravely by her side, fighting his battle with stern and uncomplaining patience, though he bears a mortal wound already in his heart.

Just before they reach the farm-house door he takes her hand in his.

"You forgive me?" he says gently.

"I have nothing to forgive," she answers, with low and piteous voice. "I can only pray you to pardon me for any pain I may have unwittingly caused."

"You are in no way to blame," he says, with a brave good man's unselfish tenderness. "You did your best to show me how foolish I was; but I was mad, and would not see."

They stand alone in the bleak wild scene, the little spot of light still gleaming clearly and steadfastly through the deepening gloom.

"I will say farewell now to all my hopes," he says, with the passionate regretfulness of

one who voluntarily foregoes his self-promised bliss. "Farewell Yolande. I may call you that this once, may I not? I thought it the loveliest, sweetest name I had ever heard—once. I shall think so even after to-night. But from henceforth I will not trouble you with my foolish hopes."

Their hands meet and clasp; but he gives her no kiss on hand or brow. It is as if he parted with the dead, and went out thenceforth into the coldness and emptiness of a new life, where one word haunts him with the bitterness of a lost and buried joy. That word is only "missing."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE bright-faced, short-petticoated, Welshwoman who opens the door at Sir Edward's knock, stares in open-eyed amazement at her visitors. However, she leads them into the bright clean little kitchen, and divests Yolande of her damp outer garments, while Sir Edward explains their mishap, and asks if there is any one who could take a message to the Hall.

They are closer to Pwym Dyas than to Llewellyn Park, and Yolande suggests sending there for assistance; but Sir Edward negatives the proposal after a few moments' consideration, as he knows Mr Bertram is up in London at present.

"It is only a question of an hour longer,"

he says; "and they will be anxious about us at the Hall."

So it ends in a note being written, and one of the farm-lads despatched with it, while he and Yolande make up their minds to wait with what patience they can for the arrival of a conveyance.

It is very pleasant in that cosy kitchen; and Sir Edward insists upon Miss Mervyn's boots being removed and put to dry, and persuades the good-natured woman to make them some hot tea, and behaves altogether in such a frank, elder-brotherly manner, that Yolande feels all the awkwardness of the situation vanish, and sits contentedly on her high-backed chair with her little stockinged feet on the fender and her damp shining hair unloosed and falling around her—a picture of beauty and comfort upon which Sir Edward feasts his eyes unsparingly.

After the tea, however, she finds her eyes grow strangely heavy, and her head aches and throbs so violently, that the slightest

motion or noise is painful in the extreme. Do what she can, her eyes will close; and the chatter of the Welshwoman becomes more and more indistinct; and her husband at the farm, and her sons at the Aberdare Collieries, grow strangely mixed and confused in her listener's mind. Then some one puts a cushion behind her head, and she leans contentedly back, and knows no more of what happens till she starts up, shivering violently, and hears the old eight-day clock over the chimney-piece striking nine.

"Why, where am I?" she cries, in bewilderment, as she turns her eyes from one unfamiliar object to another.

"You have been asleep," says Sir Edward, coming over to her side, while the woman plies her knitting-needles and with placid amusement surveys the pair.

She knows the master of Llewellyn Hall well; and she immediately jumps to the conclusion that he is courting this sweet young creature who looks like a being from another

world, with her pale lovely face and fleece of golden locks. She stoops intently over her knitting and pretends to become oblivious of their presence as the young man bends so anxiously over the beautiful figure, wondering why strange shivers shake her from time to time, when her hands are so hot, her cheeks so brightly flushed.

"Has no carriage come yet?" asks Yolande, wearily, as, after one feeble effort to sit upright, she leans her aching frame against the pillows again.

"No," he says; "I cannot imagine why. I hope the stupid fellow hasn't lost his way."

"How the wind howls!" exclaims Yolande, shivering again so violently that her very teeth chatter.

"Are you cold? Whatever makes you shake like that?" exclaims Sir Edward, in alarm.

"I don't know," says the girl, putting up her hands to her aching head. "I am not

cold. I am very hot. Feel." And she places one little burning hand in his.

"Oh, if they would only come!" he cries, impatiently, as he strides over to the window and looks out at the black, howling night.

But another half-hour passes before the welcome sound of wheels is heard; and then, when he has given the mistress of the farm a sovereign for her trouble, and wrapped Yolande in a thick scarlet shawl she insists upon lending her, they get into the carriage, and are soon driving rapidly away through the storm and gloom of the wild night.

That strange languor and fatigue steal again and again over Yolande's aching body. She feels as if a heavy weight were lying on her chest, and every moment breathing becomes more difficult. She is alarmed, and yet too weary and faint to speak about it. Suddenly, after one of the long shivers, she begins to cough—a harsh, hoarse, terrible cough,

that sounds even worse to the ears that hear it than to herself.

"Oh, you are ill—you are suffering!" he cries, in an agonised voice that sounds dull and far away to her ears.

She cannot contradict him; she feels that speech is almost beyond her strength with the dead heavy weight on her chest, the strange oppression in her laboured breath. She is beyond all resistance when he takes her in his kind strong arms and lays her head against his shoulder, drawing the warm crimson folds of her shawl more closely round the slender figure, and murmuring tender, gentle words as a mother might murmur to her sick child.

At last the carriage stops. She has no notion of time or place. She is just barely conscious of a group of frightened faces, of a buzz of anxious voices; and then some one carries her up the broad oak stairs, and some one else takes off her clothes, and she is laid in the softest of white nests—too utterly spent

and weary to speak, or care, or look at her attendant, who is no other than kind-hearted, faithful Rose.

"She will be all right to-morrow," says the girl, coming out to speak to Sir Edward, who hangs anxiously about the passage, and cannot be persuaded to eat, drink, or rest.

"I have sent for Evans," he says, alluding to the family doctor. "I shall wait up till he comes. Are you going to stay with her?" he continues, anxiously.

"Of course," answers Rose, bravely, though she feels her own hopes sinking lower and lower at every word he speaks, though she knows she has met her rival in this girl she has loved so dearly.

"Oh, thank you a thousand times!" he says, gratefully. "It is all my fault, you know," he goes on, with passionate remorse—"all my fault! Good Heaven, when I think of it, it nearly drives me mad! If anything happens to her what am I to do?"

"Nothing will happen, I hope," returns

Rose, soothingly. "Don't distress yourself so much. She has caught a chill, and the fall must have bruised and shaken her; but a few days' rest and nursing will soon put her all right."

Then she goes away into the room again, where poor Yolande is growing worse and worse every minute, for the hard, hacking cough is accompanied now by spitting of blood; and Rose sends an urgent message to Miss Llewellyn to come up and see her.

Hour after hour passes, and, even to their inexperienced eyes, the girl seems worse after each. They watch beside her all night, and at daybreak the doctor at last arrives. He had been away when the message was sent. His face grows very grave as he looks at his patient.

"She is very ill," he says; "it is inflammation of the lungs."

All through that miserable Sunday the girl lies unconscious on her bed, knowing no one;

feverish and rambling in her talk, utterly prostrate and helpless.

Mrs Davies is of course informed of the catastrophe, and hurries off with all speed to Llewellyn Park. To remove the girl is out of the question, and it is equally impossible for the good schoolmistress to forego her own duties at this the heaviest time of the year. She is obliged, however, to yield to Rose Bertram's frantic entreaties, and leaves her to nurse her friend with all the zeal and devotion of her large-hearted nature. It is a relief to know that Yolande is not entirely among strangers.

She seeks an interview with the doctor, and begs him to tell her if there is any danger, for she is uncertain whether to telegraph to the Court or not. But Doctor Evans will not commit himself yet.

"Careful nursing," he says, "and strict attention to my orders are all that are needed. It is a case that depends more on nursing than medicine."

And Mrs Davies, feeling sure that weak inexperienced girls like Enid and Vi would only do more harm than good, decides on waiting a day or two longer before alarming them with such tidings. Of Denzil Charteris she does not think at all.

Sir Edward is reduced to a state of pitiable despair. He waylays the doctor at every visit; he bribes the servants to peep into the sick-room on every possible pretence, that he may know how the patient is; in fact he behaves in a manner so wild and irrational that he nearly drives his sister frantic.

All the guests have left now. The house is strangely quiet and desolate; and its master only feels, as each long day goes by, that if he could offer every valuable or precious thing he possesses, if he could turn his heart's blood into payment for that fragile life still trembling in the balance, he would do so without an instant's hesitation. But the greatest love cannot purchase a human life.

If he had any work or occupation to employ

his time or concentrate his thoughts upon, he would not suffer so severely. But he has nothing ; he can only sit in passive idleness, waiting, waiting—oh, the heartsick anguish of that word!—waiting for some hopeful tidings that yet never come through all those weary days.

. . . . . .

It is a week since Yolande fell ill ; and to-day for the first time one tiny symptom of a change has been observed—not much, not anything on which to build the certainty of hope, but still something that has lightened the load upon Sir Edward's heart, something which causes him, as he sits now in his own quiet study, to bow his face on his trembling hands while great drops trickle and fall from his hidden eyes, in the gratitude and relief of this most exquisite moment.

For half-an-hour he sits motionless ; then the entrance of a footman rouses him. The man stirs the fire and lights the reading-lamp, and places a salver of letters and papers on

the table by his master's side. The sight of that pile rouses Sir Edward from his reverie. All through this dreary anxious week his correspondence has been neglected and his papers have been unread; and now with a vigorous effort he draws up his chair to the table and commences to look over the accumulated pile.

The first letter he opens makes him stare in bewilderment. It is from the editor of the *Ystradffelter Express*, a local paper he had once refused to patronise, to the great irritation of its publisher, and runs as follows:—

"DEAR SIR,—As I received no answer to my communication of the 1st instant, I have published the item alluded to, and forward copy of the *Ystradffelter Express* of the 2d of November for your perusal."

"What the deuce does the fellow mean?" exclaims Sir Edward, in astonishment, as he re-peruses this epistle, and still cannot imagine its drift.

Then it occurs to him that the best way of solving the matter will be to look over the papers. And he begins to search among London weeklies, and dailies, and Welsh *Couriers* and *Expresses* for the special one to which his attention has been directed.

It is not among the heap beside him; and, after a good deal of time and patience exhausted in the search, he rings the bell for the footman.

"James," he says, "has a *Ystradffelter Express* been sent here within the last week?"

The man looks slightly confused.

"Yes; I believe—I mean I don't know, sir," he stammers. "I fancy I heard Thompson say that such a paper had come, but that he did not like to send it up, as you once told him if that paper ever came to the hall he was to light the fires with it."

"Yes; it's a scurrilous rag, I know," answers Sir Edward. "But, as it happens, I want to see last week's—the 2d. Just go and

see if it's downstairs, and tell Thompson another time not to be in such a hurry to act on his own authority in matters that don't concern him."

The man bows, and beats a hasty retreat, while Sir Edward spends the intervening time between his absence and return in reading some of his letters; and the bewilderment on his face deepens as each one is perused and thrown aside.

"Have they all gone mad," he says; "or is it a hoax?"

Presently the man enters with the paper for which his master has asked, and a muttered apology to the effect that, as he had forbidden it ever to come into the house, no one had liked to bring it up with the others. Sir Edward cuts his explanation short and dismisses him; then he draws his chair close to the light, and opens out the hitherto despised chronicle, with a vivid interest and eagerness that would have gladdened its editor's heart could he have seen it.

He begins at the first page and runs his eye over numerous advertisements of every description. There is nothing there of any interest to him. Then comes a list of local births, deaths, and marriages—about which the only thing remarkable is the recurrence of similar names. Then come long notices of board meetings, school meetings, chapel meetings, and penny readings, odd fragments of poetry, chiefly Welsh, descriptions of crimes, criminals, and misdemeanours, colliery accidents, farming items, jokes, tales, and local gossip.

Hitherto nothing has rewarded his efforts; and he is just about to throw the paper down in disgust, when a short paragraph, in which his own name figures, catches his eye. He reads it, and then he sits gazing blankly at the paper, reading over and over again those few lines, and yet utterly unable to comprehend what they mean, so dazed and bewildered does he feel; yet presently, when the cloud clears off from his brain, he

finds himself studying these words as though he had not gone over them half a score times already :—

"We believe, on good authority, that Sir Edward Llewellyn, of Llewellyn Park, is shortly to be united to Miss Mervyn, of Mervyn Court, Ashbourne, Devon. The young lady is a guest at Llewellyn Hall at the present time."

"The infernal liars!" mutters the young man, wrathfully, as he dashes the paper to the ground.

It then suddenly occurs to him that the letter alluded to may furnish some clue to this mystery. Hereupon ensues another search, and at last the missive is found. This is its purport :—

"The editor of the *Ystradffelter Express* will have much pleasure in inserting the notice Sir Edward Llewellyn has forwarded, unless he hears anything to the contrary from that gentleman before going to press."

"Hang it all, who has been taking these

liberties with my name?" mutters the irate baronet. "I must see into this at once."

But he knows well enough that he cannot do anything till the following morning, when he must drive into the town and see the editor himself, and ascertain how such an unauthenticated statement came to be inserted.

"Of course it must be contradicted at once," he says to himself. "Ah, me, my darling, if it were only true, what a happy man I should be to-night!"

Again and again his eyes turn to the newspaper, and again every time does he marvel how such a report could have spread in so short a space. It is only eight days since Yolande came to the Hall, eight days since that memorable drive, eight days since fear and anxiety for her welfare have changed him into a haggard, careworn man.

"It can't have done any mischief yet," he thinks, wearily, after long cogitation has made his head ache as its only result. "She does not know of it at all events;

and the fellow she is engaged to—if she is engaged—is not likely to hear it; and so I can soon set matters straight. But I'm determined to get at the bottom of this, and see if anything more than editorial love of gossip led to its insertion."

And somehow—unconscious as he is of all enmity roused against himself, or the girl he loves so vainly—a doubt creeps into his mind as to whether some deep and wanton motive has not had a part in this senseless, foolish trick, or some hidden malice lies beneath the surface of those brief false words. He has no reason to fear treachery for himself or for her; and yet he does fear it; and a strange dread and a hot anger rise up in his heart the more he thinks of the matter.

This is a hard night for him, despite the last news he hears of Yolande's faint but sure amendment. He tosses sleeplessly on his couch, wondering what she would say if she knew the lie that had coupled her name with

his, and sent it broadcast at the fancy of every gossiping tongue in the county.

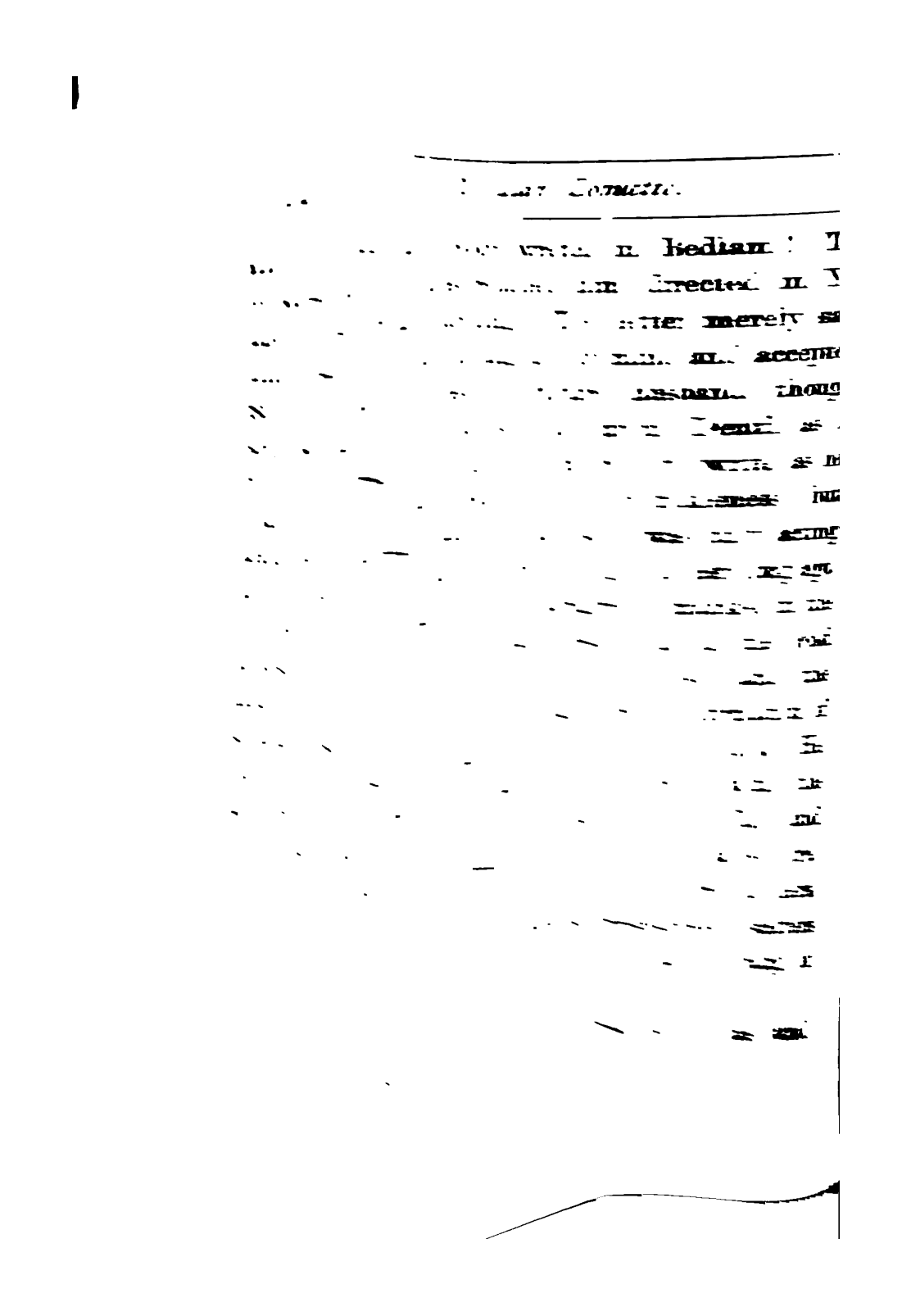
More and more uneasy does he become the more he thinks of it; and the long dark hours go on, and he lies wide awake, only longing and looking for the morning, only trusting that his refutation of the lying paragraph may come before it has had time to work mischief to his darling—for of himself he never thinks.

Alas, if he only knew what mischief it has worked, his self-reproach would be ten thousand times sharper than it is!

. . . . . .

Denzil Charteris sits in his library, alone. He has been alone the whole day long, fighting with a "devil worse than any death," as the poet calls it, the furious jealousy of a wronged and self-deluded man.

A letter and a newspaper lie before him—small things, insignificant things enough, and yet they have been able to wreck a man's life, they have rendered him for the time being



her. There is nothing improbable or unlikely in this sudden change. Has she not tricked young Stapleton in the self-same manner? Is it likely she should resist the temptation again? Besides, Sir Edward Llewellyn is far wealthier than Denzil Charteris. So he goes on from thought to thought, until a thousand jealous demons seem to take possession of him; and he spends the whole long terrible day in his lonely room, desperate with grief and agony and shame, utterly unable to account for any action, to conquer any paroxysm of fury.

It grows dusk. The light of the fire burns low, the shadows fall broadly and slowly and dimly across the darkening room; but the man sitting there with bowed head and tortured heart seems to take no heed of time, to be utterly insensible to anything around, save only the knowledge of his own suffering freshly dealt by a woman's hand.

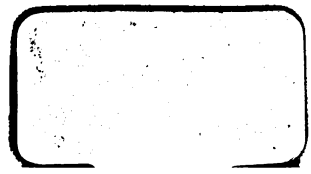
Yet suddenly, when the soft gloom is deepest, he becomes conscious of some other presence beside him, of a tender voice whose

soothing tones steal like music to his bewildered brain, and rob it of some of the fierce dazed horror that has made it burn with murderous passion throughout those wretched hours. He does not question how it is that Pauline should be there beside him now, weeping passionate tears of sorrow for his sorrow, whispering tenderest words of peace and consolation in this most terrible crisis of his life. He may be mad or dreaming; he neither knows nor pauses to question it. She has suited her time so well; she has come just when the force and fury of the storm have left him weak and passive in her skilful hands. It does not need much, only the tears of a true and unalienated sympathy, only the showing up the contrast betwixt fidelity and faithlessness, only gentle ministry to mind and body, just when the long strain of suffering has left them feeble as an infant's. Before these arts he falls, before the splendour of the voluptuous beauty thrown into his very arms, the

declaration of the long faithful devotion this one woman at least has held for him, he has neither wish nor will to resist now. Her words do not stir his heart—it is utterly dead; but the thought that the cruel girl who has so deceived him should see her arts have not ruined his life, steals feverishly into that deadly apathy and arouses it into life.

He leans his burning brow upon the temptress's breast, he listens to her sweet soft whispers. Hating one woman for her falseness, he clings to another for her seeming truth. Ere two days have passed they are married by special licence at Beechhampton Priory.

So the printed lie does its work fatally well, while Yolande lies prostrate and unconscious of the fearful blow it has dealt; and the man she has loved so dearly, binds himself in fetters indissoluble to the traitress who has deluded both.

END OF VOL. II.

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